The systematic theology of Charles Williams

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The Systematic Theology of

Charles Williams

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The thesis offered in this study of Charles Williams is that the work of this man, who regarded himself primarily as a poet and a man of letters, when examined closely and as a whole reveals the fact that he was a Christian theologian of remarkable originality and depth. It is an attempt to show the way in which all his work - poetry, drama, criticism, fiction, occasional essays - is united by a rich and coherent pattern of ideas and beliefs. Despite the prodigious variety of literary genre and style, his religious concerns and theological positions remain constant. The point is made that each work reflects every other work and that a true understanding of the structures of thought and feeling which constitute his distinctive sensibility will not be obtained if any are excluded from serious consideration.

After defining, in the Introduction, what the term Systematic Theology is intended to convey, the attempt is made to trace the shape of his theological system by a chronological investigation of his work. In the earliest poetry, despite its inferior quality, certain distinctive themes are clearly sounded. These are developed, extended and enriched in various ways in later works. A number of ruling ideas emerge: the belief in the intimate relation between natural and supernatural and the

glow of Divine life in the ordinary things of the physical world; the ideas of exchange, substitution and co-inherence. Around these themes Williams constructs his doctrines of God, man and the world; Creation, Incarnation and Atonement. The themes undergo many metamorphoses, but the pattern of thought and feeling is always recognisable and the integrity of the system remains unimpaired.

INTRODUCTION

The term Systematic Theology is conveniently wide in its range of reference. Not only can it be used to describe works that make an obvious attempt at providing a closely argued and deliberately comprehensive scheme of Christian doctrine like the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas and the Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin, Karl Barth's many-volumed Church Dogmatics and Darwell Stone's handbook Outlines of Christian Dogma; its use can be legitimately extended into less obvious areas - to cover, for instance, the deistic tract of Matthew Tindal, Christianity as old as Creation, Friedrich Schleiermacher's Liberal Protestant 'manifesto', Der Christliche Glaube, or Charles Gore's philosophical essay, The Reconstruction of Belief. Charles Williams never attempted to produce a work in this mould, and the use of the term in relation to the whole body of his writing needs to be justified.

Despite the diversity of ecclesiastical allegiance and theological outlook displayed in the works already cited, a common purpose is discernible, and Darwell Stone points to it in the opening chapter of his book when he suggests that

> If the Christian religion can be seen to possess a great harmony of consistent thought, that will be to many minds as strong

> evidence of its truth as they think themselves likely to obtain.[1]

And some sixty-five years later, John Macquarrie, a scholar with an entirely different cast of mind, in the Preface to his own compendious volume Principles of Christian Theology described his purpose in words which are strongly reminiscent of Darwell Stone's.

> Christian Theology seeks to think the Church's faith as a coherent whole. It aims not only at showing the internal coherence of the Christian faith, that is to say, how the several doctrines constitute a unity, but also exhibiting the coherence of this faith with the many other beliefs and attitudes to which we are committed in the modern world.[2]

The significant words in these two extracts are, respectively, 'harmony' and 'coherence'. The systematic theologian seeks to enlighten and inform by demonstrating, according to the pattern of his own intellectual and emotional sensitivity, the inter-relation of the doctrines of the Christian religion and their essential unity, however complex. Consequently a Systematic Theology can be thought of as something which, while not perhaps a single work, can be seen quite clearly to be an attempt at presenting a coherent account of the Church's faith.

In the case of Charles Williams it is necessary to start with the brute fact that he never regarded his primary task to be a theological one, and his short history of the Church, The Descent of the Dove, (London, 1939) begins with a definition of theology that reveals a

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1 Outlines of Christian Dogma, (London, 1900), p.14.

2 Principles of Christian Theology, (London, 1966), p.vii.

sensibility radically different from that of a systematizer, and at odds with the, frequently narrow, emotional attitudes and intellectual framework of the professional theologian.

> The beginning of Christianity is, strictly, in a point in time. A metaphysical trigonometry finds it among the spiritual secrets, at the meeting of two heavenward lines one drawn from Bethany along the Ascent of Messias, the other from Jerusalem against the Descent of the Paraclete. That measurement, the measurement of eternity in operation, of the bright cloud and the rushing wind, is, in effect, theology.[1]

In addition to a few occasional essays, Williams produced only four books which are directly concerned with theological questions: a small proportion of his entire output. Yet it is the contention of this present study that he was a systematic theologian of outstanding ability, and that the close examination of his work reveals a pattern of theological apprehension - expressed, admittedly, in a variety of literary forms and with varying degrees of seriousness - that is not merely self-consistent and comprehensive but original in ways that illuminate every important area of Christian thought and experience.

The depth of his mind and the power of his imagination are the more remarkable in the light of the fact that his background was narrow and the manner of his life, by contemporary standards, humdrum. He inherited neither wealth nor privilege, and his formal education extended only as far as a brief period of study at University College, London. Having won a scholarship to the College he was forced to withdraw after two

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1 p.1.

years through lack of funds.[1] At the age of eighteen he was employed at the Methodist Book Room in Holborn, and, four years later, in 1903, he moved to the Oxford University Press where he remained until his death in 1945.[2] Apart from his normal editorial work for the Press and his numerous contributions to current periodicals, Williams, during the forty years of his working life, produced seven volumes of poems, nine plays, seven novels, five works of literary criticism, four books of theology, and eight biographies. The output may not be vast but the range is prodigious, and it is this which makes the investigation of his work peculiarly difficult. The investigator has to cope, not only with new, and sometimes, obscure ideas, but with a bewildering variety of literary form. But while there is difficulty, there is also a compensating fascination, for close examination of the whole body of the work reveals not merely the variety of its parts but their ultimate unity and close coherence. Plays, novels, literary criticism, theological essays, poems, and even historical biographies, reflect each other and cannot be fully understood in isolation from each other. However various the forms, the motifs remain the same. Dorothy Sayers makes this point in her Introduction to the second edition of Williams's biography of James I, (1951)

> ... that which in one of the novels or plays may seem merely entertaining, romantic, or fantastical is seen to be but the exposition in action of some profound and challenging verity,

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1 A.M. Hadfield, An Introduction to Charles Williams (London, 1959), p.25.

2 Ibid., p.35.

> which in the theological or critical books is submitted to the analysis of the intellect; and conversely.[1]

That Williams himself was not unaware of this quality of interdependence in his writings, and, to a certain extent even cultivated it, is suggested by a remark he makes in the Preface to his critical study The English Poetic Mind (London, 1932). The subject under discussion is Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida and he refers to his own indifferent attempt, of three years earlier, to convey, in the form of verse-drama, the internal conflict which frequently accompanies creative activity; which might have accompanied Shakespeare's work and might have been responsible for the peculiar difficulties of the play.

> ... on the central question of Troilus I am not conscious of owing any particular debt at all. Something of the possibility I tried to put into verse in my Myth of Shakespeare; it is here defined in prose. [My italics].[2]

This is not to suggest that Williams's work is a carefully and self-consciously constructed edifice - both the circumstances of his life as an editor in a publishing house as well as his own temperament mitigated against such a construction - but to emphasise the fact of its fundamental unity. It is governed by certain ruling ideas, and these are essentially theological in character, their origin is a religious 'vision' of the world. The attempt to chart the course of that 'bright cloud and rushing wind' was Williams's chief concern throughout his life.

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1 p.x.

2 p.vi.

It is possible to examine his work in a number of ways. Two which immediately suggest themselves are examination under the categories either of literary form or of Christian dogma. Dangers attend both of these approaches. The first kind of examination, while doing justice to his work as a creative artist, will tend to lead in the direction of the technical world of literary criticism, and the shape of Williams's theological apprehension might easily be obscured. The second approach will lay bare the intellectual framework of his activity, but will tend to confine the investigation within the walls of academic theology. It could easily fail to bring out the rich variety of his personality and mask the sensibility vital to a true understanding of his work. The first is the danger of over-subtlety, the second is the danger of over-simplification. A third way lies open: the consideration of the works in their chronological order, and it is along these lines that I have chosen to conduct this study. It is not without its own dangers, the chief of which is the tendency to produce a study that hovers uneasily between the worlds of biography and commentary. None the less I believe it to be the only approach which will do justice to the variety of the works and, at the same time, reveal the pattern of religious ideas which draws them into a unity. It is an attempt to see in the work the gradual unfolding of a unique vision of life; an attempt at showing not only the coherence of Williams's intellectual and imaginative activity, but the growth of his ability to embody his religious apprehension in literary forms that are the perfect expression of his vision.

CHAPTER I

EARLY POETRY

Intelligent appraisal of the work of Williams is difficult to find. Perhaps the most perceptive criticism has come from the pen of Anne Ridler, herself a poet, and a close friend of Williams during the later years of his life. In her long introduction to the collection of his essays she entitled The Image of the City (London, 1958) she analyses his literary activity in the following way:

> It is when we come to apply the adjective major to any particular form, to speak of him as a major poet or a major critic, that the doubt arises. This is partly because the ideas he was expressing were always more important to Charles Williams than the medium of expression, and the choice of a medium (apart from poetry) was governed for him by the demands of the moment - that is chiefly by the need to earn money, but also by his own generous readiness to respond to any request which he had it in his power to satisfy.[1]

All these remarks are illuminating, but it is the words in parentheses, 'apart from the poetry', which are the most significant. The choice of this medium of expression was always made with deliberation and passion.

It is possible, without being ludicrous, to say that in some ways Williams resembles the Apostle Paul. Both men produced work the major part of which can be called 'occasional', both were more concerned with

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1 p.x.

the essential nature of their ideas than with the medium of their expression, and both became least effective in the compositions that were the most carefully planned and painstakingly wrought. There is a nice irony in the fact that it is Paul's poetic flights and Williams's theological essays which have made the deepest impression on readers. For Williams it was a cruel irony, and the inscription on his tombstone in the churchyard of St. Cross, Oxford is a bleak reminder of his personal tragedy: 'Charles Williams. Poet. Under the Mercy'. He had a profound belief in himself as a poet, and this must be the starting-point of any serious investigation of his work.

Throughout his life his love of poetry was a compulsive and definitive force. The deep seriousness with which he regarded the art is nowhere more explicitly displayed than in his comments on Paradise Lost and Milton's declared intention of 'justifying the ways of God to man.'

> It is not and cannot be concerned with anything but itself. Nor shall we, reading these lines, expect this poetry to fulfil its own desire after any style but its own .... We shall, in fact, require only that those three lines shall prelude a sufficiently satisfying sequence; in short, that the poem shall justify itself. Doing that, it will come as near justifying the ways of God to man as anything can. /My italics/.[1]

It would be a mistake to imagine that Williams is here reviving the Arnoldian dogma by which literature becomes a substitute for religion. His intention is to suggest that the intuitive apprehension of a poem as great as Paradise Lost will, in some sense, be an apprehension of the relation between God and Creation: that the recognition of the

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1 The English Poetic Mind (London, 1932), pp.117-118.

imaginative organisation in a poem can be the intimation of the divine organisation in the universe. Williams took the greatest delight in the ceremony of poetry and the constant preoccupation with imaginative style and artistic form reflected an integral part of his personality.

C.S. Lewis, in a tribute to Williams, published a year after his friend's death, recalls his innate love of ritual.

> Firstly he was a man fitted by temperament to live in an age of more elaborate courtesy than our own. He was nothing if not a ritualist. Had modern society permitted it he would equally have enjoyed kneeling and being knelt to, kissing hands and extending hands to be kissed. Burke's 'unbought grace of life' was in him. But secondly, even while enjoying such high pomps, he would have been aware of them as a game: not a silly game to be laid aside in private, but a glorious game well worth the playing.[1]

Like W.H. Auden,[2] Williams's love of the serious game of ritual was an aspect of a particular kind of poetic sensibility. A poem is also a game - it has a formal pattern of its own - and, in a real sense, is a ritual. Both poetry and religious ceremonial are the outward expressions of the inner coherence of all existence, and it was in poetry that Williams found himself most intensely aware of that pattern.

Having said all this, one is immediately faced with the problem of Williams's singular failure to achieve recognition as a poet. With the exception of a handful of admirers the literary world has chosen to ignore

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1 Essays presented to Charles Williams (Ed. C.S. Lewis, London, 1947), pp.ix-x.

2 In 1937 Christopher Isherwood spoke of the restraint he had to exercise over his fellow author during the period of their collaboration.

> Auden is a musician and a ritualist .... If Auden had his way, he would turn every play into a cross between grand opera and high mass.

W.H. Auden. A Collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Monroe K. Spears. Englewood Cliffs, 1964, p.10.

him.[1] There is a variety of reasons for this attitude. Many critics find the sheer strangeness of his mature style forbidding and it is evident that there is an unwillingness to make the intellectual and imaginative effort required in order to come to terms with works that appear so strange in the context of twentieth century poetry. But there is also a more serious explanation, and this lies in Williams's verse itself. When first confronted by the poems there is little indication that the intellectual and imaginative effort will be rewarding. Even in the best of his poetry the reader cannot escape the sense of dichotomy between intention and realisation. The vision which lies behind the words seldom becomes actual in them. There is a general sense of significance which the language fails to particularise. Without this particularisation a poem can never be felt 'in the blood and felt along the heart.' Williams lacked that instinctive ease of disciplining and manipulating language in the specific ways the art-form requires.[2] The tragedy of his position lies in the paradoxical fact that he was a man endowed with an artist's vision and a poet's sensibility, but was capable of expressing these gifts most vividly and forcefully in ways that were not poetic - obliquely, in analytical and discursive prose.

Up to the age of thirty-eight Williams produced nothing but poetry. The sixteen years spent with the Oxford University Press at Amen Corner

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1 C.S. Lewis, Anne Ridler and John Heath-Stubbs are the only critics who have expressed their admiration for Williams's work.

2 His literary ability will be dealt with in detail in the chapter on his mature poetry.

(before its removal in 1924 to Amen House, Warwick Square) saw the appearance of the four volumes which constitute all of his early verse.[1] The friendship and help of Wilfred and Alice Meynell led to the publication of his first volume The Silver Stair in 1912 by Herbert and Daniel. Poems of Conformity followed five years later. In 1920 Divorce was produced and in 1924 Windows of Night. Apart from one or two poems, the verse of this early period is almost completely unknown; a state of affairs to be accounted for not merely by the fact that copies of the volumes are difficult to obtain, but that the poetry itself does not bear much scrutiny. In his introduction to the Collected Plays of Charles Williams (London, 1963), John Heath-Stubbs remarks

> His early poetry follows a variety of styles, all of them really a little outdated at the time when he wrote. There are verses Pre-Raphaelite, Chestertonian, Kiplingesque, Macaulayish. He had also a great facility - an all but fatal facility - for pastiche of earlier styles, that of the seventeenth century for instance.[2]

As far as the early work is concerned, this facility for pastiche did prove to be fatal, for it left Williams without two of the essential requirements of a poet: a distinctive diction and a recognisable tone of voice. The technical proficiency frequently becomes glib and the reproduction of other men's tones in the idiom of earlier centuries produces, on occasions, pieces of versification which appear ludicrously

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The 1930 volume Heroes and Kings constitutes something of a problem. It cannot properly be included among the Arthurian poems, nor, strictly, does it belong with the first four collections. It appears as a kind of portentous postscript to the early poetry. A brief consideration of its significance is included at the end of this chapter.

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p.5.

out of place in the context of the rest of Williams's work. An example of this can be found in the third poem of The Silver Stair which concludes with the lines

> There is no god, nor has been, nor can be
> (Our folly this, and this our wisdom saith)
> Who is so strong and pitiful as Death.[1]

This is mere poetic posturing. Williams's characteristic attitude to death is to regard it as a cruel obscenity. The verse is pastiche Romanticism and he was never a Romantic in this nineteenth century sense of the term. Yet here he indulges sentiments that weakly reproduce the death-mysticism of the nineteenth century. Moreover the insipid wistfulness of the tone and style make the poem little more than an ineffective parody of that which he has taken as his model.

The present purpose, however, is not to examine the artistic failure of these early poems, but to indicate the appearance of certain beliefs and apprehensions which become characteristic themes of the rest of his work.

Of the four volumes published between 1912 and 1924, the first is the least interesting. It is a collection of eighty sonnets (many of which might have been composed years before their publication) whose dominating motif is the experience of human love. This is not an exclusive preoccupation however: Poem VI is entitled 'Of the mystery of God, and of the Divine Government', and Poem X 'Of the purpose of cities', and the whole sequence takes its title from the sixty-eighth poem 'An

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1 The Silver Stair, p.5.

Ascription'. This is a hymn to the Holy Ghost which ends

> Slave in Man's house, yet builder-up thereof,
> The silver and the golden stairs are His,
> The altar His - yea, His the lupanar.[1]

The collection abounds in biblical allusions and liturgical echoes, but its chief concern is romantic love. Williams speaks of love religiously and of religion in terms of romantic passion. There is something about the manner of his interweaving of these two subjects that makes him an isolated and slightly ridiculous figure against the background of contemporary literature.

> Lord Love, by thy keen fervency, which lit
> On her of God, surnamed Immaculate,
> And by the coming in of thy estate
> Usward, and by thy harrowing of the Pit,
> Though I be weak and of a feeble wit,
> And though my heart be light enough in weight,
> I have a prayer to thee ....[2]

He deliberately adopts a 'high Style' by holding the main clause back for several lines in the manner of Milton, but his address 'Lord Love' is more than a matter of poetic ostentation - it is a title of courtesy and in keeping with the ascription of Mary 'surnamed Immaculate'. Here, as in a number of the other poems, Williams is displaying both the influence of Dante and his own passionate interest in the literature of the Middle Ages which embodied so much of ceremoniousness and the ethos of 'amour courtois'.

Towards the end of the sequence there is a group of six poems called

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1 Ibid., p.73.

2 Ibid., p.60.

by a separate title The Passion of Love in which the themes of religion and love are most closely woven together. It is significant that, as in many of the poems of the Middle Ages, the Virgin Mary figures prominently and that Christ is addressed throughout as Love. But Williams is doing more than regurgitate a few of the doctrines of courtly love, and, despite the tawdriness of the pre-Raphaelite style, an important note is sounded in the first poem of this little group.

> Queen in a distant and forgotten land,
> Upon the borders of that harboured sea
> Where glows the Beatific Mystery,
> Thy builded palaces of silver stand:
> And fain are all who see them to demand
> In holy fear and mighty love toward thee
> That they may follow thy virginity,
> Nor lose their hope by any woman's hand.
>
> But we, for whom no gladness shall restore
> Past things, may enter in those courts no more,
> However pleasant be their shade and cool:
> Who, while the stars on their white pillars shine,
> Dream only, listening by an orchard pool,
> Of a dear face, too amorous for thine.
>
> (Our Lady the Virgin)[1]

In the traditional Petrarchan manner a pause occurs after the octave and a complementary attitude emerges in the closing lines. Into this pattern Williams fits his contrast of the two possible states of life: dedicated virginity and sexual love. The image of the builded palaces in the fourth line stands over against that of the orchard pool in the thirteenth line. Sexual continence is contrasted with romantic love: the way of renunciation with the way of affirmation. It is an inept

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1 Ibid., p.81.

little poem and one in which the reader is strongly aware of that gap between the poet's intention and his powers of actualisation,[1] but buried in the pallid, conventional imagery are three closely connected themes that become central preoccupations in Williams's later work. The first, and the most important, is suggested in the closing lines by the words 'dream' and 'amorous'. Here is a fumbling attempt to come to terms with the reality and the importance of the romantic vision (for the word 'dream' is intended here to suggest a visionary experence): to discover the true meaning of earthly, human, sexual love. These few tentative phrases of 1912 culminate thirty years later in what is possibly Williams's most profound and original work The Figure of Beatrice (published in 1943). The second theme is the more obvious, and less successful, attempt to convey the joy of a life of renunciation - in this case the deliberate choice of virginity. The third theme exists by implication only - in the contrast of these two kinds of surrender. This is the delicate relation in ordinary human life between the practice of the so-called 'two ways' of mystical theology-negation and affirmation.

In the essay already mentioned,[2] Dorothy Sayers claims that '... the whole of Williams's work may be seen, from one aspect, as a reconciliation of the two Ways'. The reconciliation is neither as explicit nor as ubiquitous as Dorothy Sayers suggests, but it is true that behind all

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1 The attempted tone of melancholic regret is forced and unconvincing.

2 Introduction to James I. Referred to on p.5.

his attempts at mapping the way of Affirmation (one of his prime concerns) there is the assumption that another way exists, and from time to time the relationship between the two ways is directly referred to and discussed. In the Arthurian poems, for instance, the complementary figures of Bors and Galahad clearly operate as symbolic representations of affirmation and negation. Both knights are vouchsafed a vision of the Holy Grail, but each perceives its splendour, and pursues his goal, after his own manner.

It could be argued that there is another, purely literary, link between this sonnet and the Arthurian cycles; that, in the second and third lines we are given the first reference to Sarras; the mythical land which 'stretches beyond the seas of Broceliande'[1] - the abode of the Blessed Trinity. The name, Sarras, itself does not appear, but, five years later in his second volume of poetry Poems of Conformity, Williams uses it in three of the poems[2] and a fourth carries a reference to Logres and Carbonek.[3] The poems themselves are of little significance but they do indicate that the Arthurian and Grail legends were already beginning to exercise a fascination over Williams's imagination.

Poems of Conformity, published in 1917, is dedicated to the poet's wife 'Michal' with a quotation from The Song of Songs,[4] and much of the

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1 Preface to The Region of the Summer Stars (1944).

2 Quincunque Vult, The Assumption, The Wars.

3 Inland Travel.

4 'Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners'.

verse perpetuates both the artistic weaknesses and thematic preoccupations of the earlier volume. There is a greater diversity of subject matter, but the dominant motifs are, once again, human love and the relation between the passional experience of earthly love and the spiritual experience of God revealing himself in the world. In a number of poems the two experiences are metaphorically identified - with, sometimes, peculiar and ludicrous effect. Ecclesia Docens,[1] for example, is a celebration of earthly love in terms of the Church. Each stanza ends with a little jingling refrain.

> In thee, in thee revealed fair,
> I end awhile my search,
> Thee, the One, Holy Catholic,
> And Apostolic Church. (v.5).

It is essentially a silly poem for, apart from one or two phrases, the verse lacks the imaginative power to compel the reader into the poetic belief that human love can be apprehended in terms of the Church or that human passion can be the vehicle for recognising spiritual values.

Although Williams's means of communication is still trite and imitative, his attitudes carry a greater sense of conviction in this volume than they do in The Silver Stair. The poem entitled Ascension despite its echoes of Hymns Ancient and Modern and its plodding rhythms manages to suggest a little of the ecstasy of love.

> A cloud of days receives him in,
> God unto God returns;

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1 pp.49-51.

> To his profoundest origin
> Love manifested yearns.
> But now he was! but now my Fair,
> Flickered his presence in your hair.[1]

The opening quatrain is nothing more than the versification of a theological posture, but the word 'flickered' in the closing couplet brings a sudden vitality to the verse, and the concrete image of fiery movement carries the poet's vision into the imagination of the reader. At an identical point in the seventh stanza there is a similar quickening of poetic power, though here the image which bears the weight is not a visual one.[2] At these moments Williams manages to convey the deeply-felt, but scarcely understood, belief that earthly forms do not merely reflect, but embody and reveal heavenly glory. Divinity is seen to be penetrating the created order and displaying its presence most vividly in the figure of the beloved. So the romantic vision becomes the means by which spiritual reality may be discerned. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of this apprehension in the structure of Williams's theology. C.S. Lewis stresses its significance in his critical tribute which introduces Essays presented to Charles Williams.

> The belief that the most serious and ecstatic experiences either of human love or of imaginative literature have such theological implications, and that they can be healthy and fruitful only if the implications are diligently thought out and severely lived, is the root principle of all his work.[3]

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1 pp.28-29.

2
> For in your face the Holy Ghost
> Kept - how long since! - his Pentecost;

3 Essays presented to Charles Williams, p.vi.

Williams's apprehension cannot yet be called a doctrine, for in these early poems it is the reality and seriousness of the specifically human passion that is being emphasised. The working-out of the theological implications was to begin a decade later.

There is, however, one poem in this collection, The Continuing Doctrine, which, in the strangeness of its diction, suggests that the germ of a distinctive theological vision based on the experience of the lover was beginning to form in Williams's imagination. It is, like the others we have been considering, a love poem.

> You whose wit in mouth or line
> Of cheek and temple may define
> An exact morality
> Or a world's theology
> Passionately divine.[1]

The suggestion is slight but unmistakeable. The peculiar use of the words 'define', 'exact', 'theology', and 'morality' in this context conveys the belief that erotic love, far from drowning the lover in a sea of emotion, quickens his sensibility and sharpens his awareness of the order and precision of the universe he inhabits. His experience is that of one to whom a special revelation has been granted, a revelation of a coherent and measurable pattern in the fabric of human experience. Ten years later Williams was to adumbrate this perception in prose, in his first novel Shadows of Ecstasy.

The Continuing Doctrine provides a natural link between the love lyrics, which form the major part of Poems of Conformity, and the two

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1 pp.80-81.

poems which occur earlier in the volume: Ballade of Numbers and The Clerk.[1] These verses have nothing to say about human love, but a great deal to say about exactitude and definition: theology and morality. They are poor little poems written with a heavy-handed humour and an abundance of cliches that almost prevent their being taken seriously, but the ideas lying behind them are deeply important for any detailed study of Williams's development.

Before the dawn of the first of days
Ere yet in heaven the sun grew bright
.....
Ere yet the earth was made or the worlds begun
The finger of God began to write:
'Three times three are twenty-one'. (v.1.)

The clerk sat on his stool
And another line began;
The heroes called him a fool
But God had called him man
He said; 'Two fives are ten
And carry one along'.
The devil shuddered in his den
And heaven broke forth in song. (v.2.)

At first sight the lines might read like a versification of one of the classical proofs for the existence of God, the 'Argument from Design', for both stanzas with their slightly ridiculous image of arithmetical calculation assert both the orderliness of God's activity and the perceptible design of Creation. But Williams goes beyond the Teleological Argument to suggest that the perception of pattern and order is an apprehension of the nature of God Himself, that mathematical pattern is not merely part of God's activity in relation to Creation, but part of

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1 pp.16 & 17.

His very Being. This is an argument not from the design to the Designer but from design to Design; from the earthly representation to the heavenly archetype.[1] Almost twenty years later in the theological essay He came Down from Heaven, Williams, extending the argument, spoke specifically of heavenly glory as a geometrical pattern and of morality as 'the mathematics of power'.[2] The second stanza carries the argument further. Arithmetical calculation becomes an image of power - the imposition of divine order on chaos. Evil is seen as the violation of the diagram of God's glory and man, even in those actions which appear to be trivial or mundane, is involved in the conquest of that which abhors and fears the diagram.

Only three years elapsed between the publication of Poems of Conformity and the appearance of the third collection of poems Divorce.[3] The predominant themes of the two earlier volumes again show themselves but here the weaving together of religion and love, the experience of God and the love for the beloved, is far closer than it has been previously. In the love-lyric To Michal: After a Vigil, for example, the poet speaks as forcefully of the wonder of the Blessed Sacrament as he does of human love. The Sacrament is seen as the meeting-place of lovers and the place at which the meaning of material creation is most

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1 Williams's Platonism will be discussed in the chapter on the novels.

2 He came Down from Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins (London, 1950), pp.33 and 35.

3 Divorce carries a prefatory note,

> (Certain of these poems have appeared in the New Witness, and two in A Miscellany of Contemporary Poetry, 1919).

fully grasped. This latter point is made clear by the use of the word 'dream' as an image of contrast at the close of each stanza

> In the true Body,
> Lo, your true face
> Looked to behold me,
> There beyond space;
> O, was an ending to dream
>
> There, where all perfect
> Matter is stored,
> In our true bodies
> Met we, Adored!
> O, but we sink now to dream[1]

Williams, for various reasons which will be discussed later, found it natural to regard Eucharistic worship and the Blessed Sacrament itself as one of the focal points of human existence and references to the Holy Communion are scattered throughout the collection.

Even the most casual reading of these poems reveals the extent to which Williams believed in the inter-penetration of the natural and the super-natural; the human and the divine. His view of, what might loosely be termed, Reality was essentially hierarchical, but the orders that constitute the hierarchy are never seen to be in isolation from each other. There is a continual inter-action and even inter-dependence. The most humdrum world is part of a grand order with heavenly dimensions, and the most trivial actions are linked with unearthly powers. This belief is expressed with varying degrees of poetic success in this third volume. The short poem Outland Travel makes its point in embarrassingly

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1 Divorce (London, 1920), pp.26-27.

jingling rhymes and mawkishly-expressed sentiments; in the longer poem Commentaries with more rhythmic control and imaginative appeal.[1] Possibly the best poems dealing with this theme are those in which the image of the city plays a significant part, namely, the sonnet sequence and Celestial Cities.[2] In Christianity the image of the city is at least as old as the Apocalypse of St. John (Williams actually quotes from St. John in the epigraph to Celestial Cities) and has been used as a symbol thousands of times in the past nineteen hundred years, but Williams extends its meaning in ways that are as original as those of St. Augustine, to whom, incidentally, he owes a great deal in many areas of his thought.

The sonnets begin with two lines in which the unmistakeable stamp of Williams is clearly discernible.

> In the high town which is eternity,
> The plotted comprehension of all souls,

The phrase 'plotted comprehension' contains this distinctiveness. The words do not create a concrete visual image, they are a type of compressed metaphysical conceit: a mathematical symbol extended to convey at one stroke unity, diversity, and complex organisation. The life of heaven to which all Christians are called possesses these particular qualities for Williams; qualities of a coherent arithmetical pattern in which the component parts are precisely related to, and utterly

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1 pp.89 and 78 respectively.

2 pp.30-32.

dependent upon, each other. In these early poems the depiction is, perhaps, a little static, but twenty-three years later the essay 'The Redeemed City' shows Williams fully alive to the dynamic nature of the image.[1] Clearly he never intended that it should suggest fixity and immobility; the whole significance of the city image lies in the fact that the life of a city is one of constant exchange and inter-dependence.

A poet works from the basic material of his own existence and experience. Williams's knowledge and love of London dominates much of his work. It figures prominently in all of his novels and in many of the poems, and in much the same way in both genres. The portrayal of the city in Celestial Cities, for example, is a rough sketch for the vision of Lester Furnivall, the main character of the last of the novels All Hallows Eve

> When our translated cities
> Are joyous and divine,
> And through the streets of London
> The streets of Sarras shine
> When what is hid in London
> Doth then in Sarras show

Here, as in the scene from All Hallows Eve, two kinds of tension are being drawn out: the tension between the ordinarily perceived London and its occasionally apprehended hidden dimensions (the earthly and the heavenly), and the eschatalogical tension between the city as it is at this moment in history and what it is called to be at the end of time. Williams depicts the supernatural, eschatalogical city by the name

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1 The Image of the City, pp.102-110.

Sarras. Its use, in this poem, is successful only because it is adequately defined by the context. In Ballade of a Country Day, on the other hand, a poem which occurs earlier in the volume, the symbol fails completely. Each stanza, including the envoy, ends with the incantation

If Sarras be, if Sarras hold the Grail.

What this is meant to convey is a question that cannot be answered. Apparently Sarras is intended to operate as some kind of inclusive image, but in this poem both it and the image of the Grail act only at the level of private ciphers.

This raises a question of critical importance in the understanding of Williams's poetry. All poets, from time to time, indulge in a private vocabulary, but Williams lapsed into a linguistic world of his own construction all too frequently. Consequently even the best of his poetry often gives the appearance of an elaborate puzzle the key of which is buried deep in the poet's mind and is inaccessible to the reader.

Divorce was published in the third year of the First World War but, apart from the short sequence In Time of War there is little overt indication that the conflict was touching Williams very deeply. It has been suggested, nonetheless, by a close friend and colleague, not only that the sufferings of war loomed large in his life, but that they are directly related to his extensive use of the image of the city.

> It was in meditation on war and his friends that he began to approach the idea that his life was involved in the lives of all other people and not only of people he had chosen to love and live with. He recognised that he benefited from the effort and pains endured by others far from him and not at the time concerned with or for him.[1]

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1 A.M. Hadfield in her biography, p.55.

And it is probable that the poems published some years after the end of the war grew out of that experience of suffering.[1] In Windows of Night, (published in 1924), Williams shows himself less mannered as a poet and less self-consciously stylistic; less concerned with metaphysical problems and more concerned with personal emotion. There is still much poetic posturing and the poems on specifically religious subjects (Christmas, Easter, Saint Michael, Saint Mary Magdalene etc.) are all drearily conventional - mediocre verses for a church hymnal. But taken as a whole the poetry in this volume shows an increased security of tone and a greater simplicity and directness.

Many of these poems indicate an awareness of pain and the frustration of human life that has been missing in earlier volumes. The Two Domes,[2] for instance, is a rather bitter meditation on the relation of the justice of God and the love of Christ to the chaos and sufferings of the world. It is not a particularly striking poem but, like so many other early compositions, contains the seeds of profoundly original perceptions, in this case, Williams's treatment of the doctrine of the Atonement in his contribution to the Symposium 'What the Cross means to me'. This essay did not appear until 1943, but twenty years earlier, contemplating the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral and the Old Bailey, (both of which were visible from his office window at the Oxford

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1 Alice Hadfield testifies to a growing awareness of pain and darkness in Williams in these years.

2 pp.23ff.

University Press), Williams realised the necessity, not only of coming to terms with the sufferings of human existence, but of overcoming the apparent dichotomy between God's love and His justice. The poem gives the first hint of a theology closely linked with the thinking which lies behind the use of the city image: a theology of substitution in which, ironically, Love, by a gracious act of exchange becomes the victim, or rather the subject, of His own Justice.

Windows of Night is also the first collection of poems in which romantic love is treated differently. One notices first, that the subject is overshadowed by other preoccupations and secondly that when it is introduced it is approached from an entirely new direction. There are, of course, a few poems which merely extend the ideas of the previous volumes. To Michal: On Bringing her Breakfast in Bed[1] for instance, sees the everyday chores of married life intertwined with the love and service of God in a pattern of glory.[2] But more frequently love is seen against a background of misery, and in two poems[3] Williams refers to the agonising experience of the loss of the vision of love.

> For ten long years together
> Can a thing be and not be,
> Till it ceases to be for ever, -
> And has this chanced to me?

On the surface the verse appears slightly cryptic but the meaning emerges

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1 p.44.

2 Williams manages to catch and hold a tone which is a mixture of comedy and solemnity.

> Here I come from the buttery
> In the land of the Trinity.

3 Antichrist and Faerie.

clearly enough. It is the portrayal of an experience of sudden disillusion when the reality of the original vision is called in question. Williams saw this experience as the cardinal problem of Shakespeare's play Troilus and Cressida, and examines some literary manifestations of the problem at some length in the critical work The English Poetic Mind.[1]

Whereas earlier poems speak primarily of the heavenly dimensions of ordinary human actions, Windows of Night emphasises the hell which lies around everyday situations. The principle is the same. Men live at the intersection of worlds - the natural world which they accept without thinking and the supernatural world, both hellish and heavenly, which is revealed only at moments of heightened awareness. In Domesticity the ordinary household scene is suddenly revealed as a mask for hidden realities of terror and obscenity.

> Where? for the very wallpaper stares straight ahead,
> Seeming neither to whisper nor wink but to speak all the time
> How beneath it the mortar is bloodily streaked, and what dead
> It hides. To the nurseries or to the cellars? Where?[2]

Although it must be admitted that Williams has a taste for the Gothick, his apprehension of the dark side of human life is not always as absurdly melodramatic as this. He introduces a dream of chaos and fear into the love lyric A Cup of Water by the simple means of referring to the horror of certain identifiable contemporary events,[3] and at least two of the

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1 Cf. p.173 in The English Poetic Mind.

2 p.24.

3 Flat was the earth, and westward was Ireland with burning
Homes and America farther with burning men. (p.36).

poems, The Purchase and Witchcraft, emphasise the suffocating narrowness, squalor and meanness of sin and its consequences. The treatment of evil and hell in this collection prefigures the searching analysis of the same subject in the novel The Descent Into Hell.

The poem Theobald's Road[1] demonstrates another way in which Windows of Night can be regarded as a forerunner of the novels. The mind of the lover waiting at the appointed meeting-place for his beloved wanders tentatively over the problem of Time.

> There must be many Theobald's Roads in the universe;
> Image of images; almost not quite, identical;
> A little above, a little below, slanting across, here but not quite here;
> Visible, tangible - but to me invisible, intangible.

The idea that the beloved could have entered a different sequence of time at first seems outlandish, but if J.W. Dunne's book An Experiment with Time can be taken with anything like seriousness, the idea might not be so foolish as it at first appears.[2] Man's existence is seen to take place on a plane at which various orders of reality meet and intersect, and, just as he is capable of experiencing, under certain conditions, the dissolution of the conventional barriers between the material and the spiritual, so he is capable of experiencing the disappearance of the arbitrary divisions of time. The theory is worked out in greater detail in three of the novels: Many Dimensions, Descent Into Hell and All Hallows Eve.

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1 pp.51-53.

2 Dunne postulates a serial view of time as opposed to a sequential view. Cf. especially the fifth chapter of An Experiment with Time.

Williams's early poetry concludes with a volume published by The Sylvan Press in a sumptuous limited edition of three hundred copies in 1930 under the title Heroes and Kings. Its significance lies primarily in that it is dominated by a series of seven Arthurian poems. Almost all the characters which figure later in Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars make their first appearance here. In 'Lancelot's Song to Morgause'[1] for example, the whole of the legend of the Dolorous Blow involving Baldin, the keeper-king, Lancelot, Guinivere and Mordred is recounted. Many readers find the later Arthurian cycles obscure and difficult. The barrier to understanding and appreciation is created not only by Williams's style and diction, but also by the lack of certainty about what is going on, for the poems are undoubtedly, in some sense, an epic cycle dependent upon narrative. But Williams's main concern is meditation on the meaning of the events and not the relating of the events themselves. Yet the events provide a framework for the meditations; a framework which must be understood if entry into the poet's imagination is to be effected. Heroes and Kings goes a long way to providing that framework.

It must be stressed that none of these poems in the 1930 volume have the intellectual subtlety or imaginative power of the later cycles. They are either straightforward lyrics on conventionally 'poetic' themes or plain narrative verses. In the long poem Lilith[2] however, there are

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1 The pages of this volume are not numbered.

2 Thirteen pages long.

stylistic features which link Heroes and Kings with Taliessein Through Logres sufficiently strongly to give the lie to the claim of C.S. Lewis that Williams's early poetry gives no promise of what was to come.[1] A passage like the following indicates the peculiar and distinctive characteristics of the mature poems.

> Beneath, low crouched the lion - material strength leashed to the will of its lord : Jerusalem reposed in the king's justice : only at hand were heard the toilers in the Temple courts who ceased not night or morning, ...

In subject matter this poem with its references to the legends of Lilith and Solomon's ring prefigures the novels (Many Dimensions and Descent Into Hell), but in diction and rhythm it looks forward to The Calling of Arthur. It seems that by 1930 Williams was at last beginning to forge a style which he believed could adequately bear the weight of his extraordinarily complex sensibility.

In the introduction to the Collected Plays of Charles Williams John Heath-Stubbs comments on Williams's poetic development.

> Charles Williams's style, like that of several other poets of the present century, underwent a marked change in his middle years .... It is a change in style rather than in ideas.[2]

The truth of Heath-Stubbs's observation will be demonstrated in the following pages. Certain recurrent themes and ruling ideas emerge from these early volumes: the intimate relation, almost the interleaving, of nature and super-nature, the religious significance of the romantic

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1 Essays presented to Charles Williams, p.vii.

2 p.v.

vision, the material creation as an embodiment of the divine glory, the inter-dependence of all human existences, the intelligible pattern of God's being and activity. These are the foundations for the systematic theology which is built up over the last twenty years of Williams's life.

CHAPTER II

1924 - 1937

In 1924 the Oxford University Press moved from its offices at Amen Corner into the more spacious quarters of Amen House and Williams entered a period of more intense literary activity. Alice Hadfield suggests that his work at the Press and the friendships he contracted there deeply affected his endeavours and were partly responsible for this new spate of activity.

> This group had an effect on Charles which can hardly be over-estimated. It released him, now rising forty, from the purely private world in which his genius had been concentrated.[1]

It is true that the years which follow 1924 mark a turning away from the religious and personal lyricism of the early poetry to literary forms which presuppose an audience - drama, the novel and literary criticism.

The Plays.

The lighter side of his creative imagination expressed itself in the verse and masques he wrote and produced for the staff of the Oxford University Press. The verse has never been published and of the three

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1 *An Introduction to Charles Williams*, p.68.

masques only two were ever printed.[1] They were acted by Williams's friends in the Press, were rehearsed and produced in the showroom (called the Library), and were not intended for publication. The ritual of the Masque and the mechanics of theatrical production seem to have appealed strongly to Williams, and by 1931 four plays had been written. But they are of little significance either theologically or aesthetically (John Heath-Stubbs does not even include them in his Collected Plays of Charles Williams) and do not warrant examination here.

A Myth of Shakespeare, published in 1929,[2] has already been mentioned as the attempt to sketch in dramatic terms the problem around which the critical essay, The English Poetic Mind, is built. Its subject is neither love nor religion but the artistic imagination; specifically, the experience in the artist, of the loss and the recovery of an imaginative vision, the transmutation of that experience into creative energy, and its embodiment in literary form. The three plays which followed immediately upon A Myth of Shakespeare, in spite of the repugnant portentousness of the style, suggest something of the same darkness and suffering that lie beneath the surface of the Shakespearian play. Their subject is a familiar one, human love: the loss of love

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1 Cf. Linden Huddleston's Bibliography in Charles Williams by John Heath-Stubbs. (Writers and their Work Series, London, 1959).

2 There is some disagreement about the publication date. Anne Ridler's bibliography in The Image of the City gives it as 1929, but in her introduction to Seed of Adam she says it 'appeared' in 1928. Huddleston gives it as 1929 and Alice Hadfield as 1928.

and the torment involved in the romantic experience. Despite the fact that the character of the Duchess in The Chaste Wanton was one of Williams's own favourites, there is little to commend these plays. The ideas themselves are not so original nor potentially so fruitful as those in the early poems, and in any case, they remain moribund in the cumbersome movements of the verse and the inadequately realised dramatic situations.[1] They are little more than a technical exercise in preparation for Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury and The House of the Octopus.

A feature which links these plays with the later drama is the figure of Satan in The Rite of Passion. This is by no means a conventional portrayal of evil, as the name might imply. Like the Satan of the Book of Job[2] the figure, enigmatically, operates as the instrument of God. He does not appear as the dramatically personified negation and antithesis of the Good (Williams eschews any suggestion of a dualism in which cosmic forces of Good and Evil oppose each other on the battleground of man's soul) but as the dramatically personified reminder of Death - and more subtly of an approach to God through the loss of life. The Satan of Three Plays assumes the role of the Skeleton in Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury and is transformed later into the Flame in The House of the Octopus.

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1 '... they cannot be called plays in the sense that his later dramatic work can: they are better suited for reading than for acting.' (Anne Ridler. Introd. to Seed of Adam (London, 1948, second impr. 1953) p.v.

2 Cf. Job, Ch. II
And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.

There is another feature of Three Plays which deserves mention as it provides further evidence of the extent to which the Arthurian tales were gripping Williams's imagination. Of the five poems that are included in the volume, three take as their subject themes which appear later in Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars. The Witch is prefaced by Taliessin's Song of Logres, and The Rite of Passion is enclosed between Taliessin's Song of the King's Crowning and Taliessin's Song of the Setting of Galahad in the King's Bed. The significance of the themes upon which Taliessin composes his songs is not fully realised by Williams at this point of his career. Three Plays was published a year after the appearance of Heroes and Kings and the Arthurian verses of the two volumes are similar in the broadly narrative presentation of their subjects.

By singularly happy chance the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral in 1935 chose to commission Williams to write a play for the Canterbury Festival of the following year. When the invitation came he was deeply immersed in the history of sixteenth and seventeenth century England. Two biographies, Bacon and James I, had already been completed for the publisher Arthur Barker, a third, Rochester, was already on the press, and the lives of Elizabeth I and Henry VII were imminent. A dramatic subject for the Canterbury commission lay close at hand. A year earlier T.S. Eliot had received the commission and had chosen as the central character of his drama an archbishop from the twelfth century. Williams turned to the century of his current preoccupation and produced another 'martyr-prelate', Thomas Cranmer.

Both Eliot and Williams employed a medium of communication strange to the contemporary English stage - verse, and both endeavoured to involve the spectator in the action of the drama by emphasising the ritualistic elements of theatrical production. There the resemblance between the two plays ends. Behind the 'arias' and choruses of Murder in the Cathedral lies the tradition of classical Greek drama. Behind the 'presentations' and the choruses of Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury lies the tradition of the English masque. Eliot's play has a stillness at its centre; it has a deliberately static quality relieved only by grand and simple gestures. In Williams's play there is a sense of constant movement: despite the solemnity of the subject, the music and pattern of the dance are never far away. A deeper and more important difference between these plays lies in the approach to the character around which the drama revolves. Williams's study of Cranmer is more deliberately psychological than Eliot's is of Becket. Murder in the Cathedral is frequently referred to as a tragedy. This is a misnomer, for psychological conflict is not the substance of the action: the conclusion is foreseen long before the Tempters enter, and the only development which takes place is that in the lives of the people of Canterbury who are forced to witness Becket's assassination. The significance of the play lies in the way in which the archbishop accepts and recognises his death. His holiness is never really in question and his martyrdom is unambiguous. Thomas Cranmer is radically different: the substance of the play is the unresolved spiritual conflict of the hero. Bewilderment and uncertainty constantly assail the archbishop: his vision is blurred and his courage

wavers. There is an ambiguity about his martyrdom and an equivocation about his holiness. The sense of determination created in the recantation speech, for instance, is almost immediately destroyed by the Skeleton's probing cross-examination a few lines later.

Cranmer. If the Pope had bid me live, I should have served him.[1]

As a dramatic and theatrical presentation Thomas Cranmer is far more successful than any of the other plays Williams wrote for public performance, and could be regarded as a conventional psychological drama (set within a religious framework) were it not for the fact that it contains a theme which stamps it with the unmistakeable mark of its creator and links it with the most profound and original of all Williams's books The Figure of Beatrice.

This is the theme of Imagery - announced, somewhat mysteriously, by the Skeleton in his first long speech.

> Hark, the images go abroad!
> Once in a way, once in an age,
> When men's spirits rage, I set the images free,[2]

Every crisis in the play is precipitated by the question of imagery. The religious conflict between the Church and the Reformers is one which revolves around images - the way in which God makes Himself known to, and in, the world. The political and emotional conflict which brings Cranmer to the chair of St. Augustine turns about a different, though allied, concept of an image - Henry's image of Anne Boleyn and that of himself

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1 Collected Plays, p.59.

2 Ibid., p.11.

as king of England. The spiritual conflict of Thomas is caused by the ambivalence of his own attitude to the place images occupy in the lives of men and in their search for God. The theme is a complicated one and Williams does not always handle it successfully. The word 'image' occurs with great frequency and conveys different meanings in different places. Unfortunately the distinction of meaning is not always clear and the result is an ambiguity which the author cannot have intended, for this is not the kind of ambiguity (embodied, for instance in the Skeleton) which extends and enriches the meaning; it is one which confuses the reader by its lack of definition.

Yet, despite the opaque nature of much of the writing, two aspects of the theme emerge with some clarity. Together they form the substance of Williams's belief about Images and, in consequence, form the essential characteristics of his doctrine of Creation.

The Protestant Cranmer has denied the 'images and substitution' of the Catholic Church, and there comes a terrible moment towards the end of the play when the Skeleton points up a hypocrisy in Thomas's attitudes by casting his life's work back in his teeth.

> Cranmer. They will burn me.
> The Skeleton. What is that, O soul,
> to thee and me?
> Thomas, all your life you have sought Christ in images,
> through deflections; how else can man see?[1]

With these words we are sent back through the play to the first entrance

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1 Ibid., p.53.

of Thomas Cranmer where his singleminded devotion to the perfection of a literary form is emphasised.

> .... I would let go
> a heresy or so for love of a lordly style
> with charging challenge, or one that softens a mile
> to a furlong with a dulcet harmony, enlarging
> the heart with delicate diction.[1]

More immediately we are reminded of the scene in which the English Bible is presented to the king with the words

> Many identities hath the sacred Word
> * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
> ... this is His type,
> ripe for communion, this is his image ...[2]

While Cranmer rejects the Catholic notion of the Presence of God in the image of the Eucharist, he fails to realise that his own apprehension of the divine is dependent upon the mediation of an image - that of the human language. The conclusion Williams draws is unambiguous: that it is impossible for men to approach God and receive His grace without the use of the material world which reflects His being. Ironically Thomas himself makes this point in his admonition to Anne where he sees the whole of life as a pattern of images and human knowledge and happiness dependent upon the true recognition of the meaning and authority of the images.

> .... You must have no sense,
> madam, but of this spiritual obedience
> to make you in mind and feature the King's creature,
> as the King is God's; be you the image of God's image.[3]

The second aspect of this theme is symbolised by the presence of

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1 Ibid., p.4.
2 Ibid., pp.19-20.
3 Ibid., p.10.

the Skeleton at all the critical moments of the play's action. The 'Other Way', the Via Negativa - that approach to God by the denial of the world - might not receive an overtly strong emphasis in the play, but the Figura Rerum, in its ironical asides, is a constant reminder of it, and also of the fact that images are only images. As such they can be misunderstood and abused. Anne Boleyn's false image of herself as queen drives her to demand the tragic marriage; Henry's false images of both Anne and his kingdom cause the ensuing events of Anne's execution and the ecclesiastical schism. Thomas, for his part, misunderstands the Catholic images of the Church and the Eucharist. All fail to recognise the essentially paradoxical nature of the Image which, at the same time, both is the reality and is not the reality. The aphorism which enshrines Williams's belief about Images and sums up his attitude to the created order is 'This also is Thou; Neither is This Thou', and it is paraphrased in one of the crucial speeches of the Skeleton.

> Anne had an image of the Crown - she is dead,
> it is sped, the image that the King had of Anne.
> Are words wiser than women or worship? safer,
> securer, purer, ...
> .... Beckon your image,
> call and repel it, serve and slay it.
> Till the day when I sound its knell and yours as well,
> have, have, have your will,
> for what it is worth, precisely for what it is worth;
> have, have, have your prayer.[1]

One quotation from The Figure of Beatrice will suffice to show the connection between the train of thought in this passage and the

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1 Ibid., p.18.

theological principle which informs the attitudes of the later work.

> Our sacred Lord, in his earthly existence, deigned to use both methods .... He commanded his disciples to abandon all images but himself and promised them, in terms of the same images a hundred times what they had abandoned.[1]

In the same year that Thomas Cranmer was produced in the Chapter House at Canterbury, Williams wrote another verse drama - for the Chelmsford Religious Drama Guild. The differences between the two works are too obvious to need discussion - Seed of Adam is a Nativity Play, and in any case, Thomas Cranmer is by far the better drama - but there are some significant similarities. On the technical side it is possible to see Williams struggling to rid himself of the sentimental Pre-Raphaelitism of his earlier diction and developing a distinctive free-verse style which is built up on a flexible system of freer syllabic metrical form and internal assonance. This development is a mixed blessing in the hands of someone like Williams who was preoccupied with the sound and texture of words and phrases, the more open framework allows for a particular kind of verbal indulgence. Opacity comes to replace sentimentality in Williams's poetry. The verse frequently cloaks the meaning in ceremonious, and sometimes pretentious, word-play.

Like Thomas Cranmer, Seed of Adam also concerns itself with the question of images, but in a more directly theological way. Its subject is the Incarnation, and in the central dialogue between Joseph and Mary, which follows the scene of the Annunciation, these four lines occur:

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1 p.10.

> .... He has thrust
> into this matter his pattern of bones, as Eve's
> towers of cheeks and arrogant torches of eyes
> edify red earth into a pattern of manhood.[1]

This is not recognisably great poetry - the typological references are confused and the individual images fail to interlock in a way that effects a single developing imaginative response in the reader. Yet they are lines of the greatest interest for embedded within the dense texture of the verse is Williams's approach to interpreting the doctrines of Creation and the Incarnation in terms of the operation of the Divine Logos. The word Logos is nowhere used in the play, nonetheless the nature of God's activity as it is envisaged here is unmistakeably the kind that can be identified with the concept of the Logos as it came to be broadly understood in the two centuries preceding the birth of Christ and as it was taken over by the Early Church. A.H. Armstrong and R.A. Markus in their book Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy claim that, in philosophical Greek the basic concept was that of a 'formative principle'.

> The Stoics used it of their God as the fiery rational forming principle of the universe, a use which they derived from the Pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus; they also used it for the formative principles of particular things, which are parts of God. In Neo-Platonic philosophical language, from Plotinus onwards, Logos comes to mean frequently 'a power which represents or expresses a higher principle on a lower order of being', a usage which may possibly be connected with Philo's employment of Logos for the instrumental and revealing principle.[2]

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1 Seed of Adam and other plays, p.11.

2 p.19.

Williams conveys this concept of 'formative principle' in the two metaphors 'thrust' and 'pattern'. The verb 'thrust', placed carefully at the end of the line for purposes of emphasis, carries the sense of active (possibly irresistible) power, and the noun pattern suggests the ideas of meaningful form or rational shape. The 'matter' of Creation, of whom the Virgin Mary is the human representative and image, is 'informed' by the activity of the Divine. In the context of the play these four lines can be read as a versification of the climactic statement in the Prologue to St. John's Gospel: ὁ λογος σαρξ ἐγενετο Out of the original 'pattern of manhood' there comes the transformed pattern 'of bones' that is Jesus. Mary, in this play, is thus the image of God's glory; the means by which men are granted the knowledge of His love. Strangely enough, Williams never united the themes of the Logos and the Image so closely in any of his later works. And the doctrine of Christ - the second person of the Trinity - as the agent of Creation is overshadowed, as we shall see, by a stranger approach to the Incarnate God.

This whole dialogue includes that other theme of crucial importance: romantic love. It is Joseph, cast in the role of the romantic lover, who most immediately recognises and understands the part Mary plays in the economy of God and the kind of image she presents. The rest of the world is by no means excluded from experiencing this mode of revelation, but the lover is the recipient of a peculiar gift. In his vision of his beloved, God's glory is apprehended with an immediacy of awareness that the rest of the world is denied. But, as in Thomas Cranmer, the image

is only the image and must be treated as such; even when the image is the Mother of God and the beloved object of Joseph's adoration. The worship of the image in the place of the reality leads quickly (as Williams shows in the novel Descent Into Hell) to perdition, and Mary herself issues a severe warning.

> The glory is eternal, not I,
> and I am only one diagram of the glory;[1]

And in the speech of the chorus that follows immediately, Williams's beloved epigram, 'This also is Thou; neither is this Thou', occurs as a refrain.

Williams's attitude cannot be mistaken for a pretentious description of the effects of sexual passion. Sex is not denied, but what is being emphasised and explored is the essentially religious quality of the romantic vision. Here we find ourselves on the familiar ground of the early poetry and on the jumping-off point for the novels.

The Novels.

In the three years between 1928 and 1931 Williams wrote five of his seven novels. War in Heaven was the first to be published (in 1930),[2] but was the second in order of production. Shadows of Ecstasy was completed a year earlier and, in its treatment of romantic love it bears a remarkably close similarity to the brief study of the same subject in

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1 p.12.

2 Cf. Anne Ridler's bibliography in the collection of essays The Image of the City, pp.195-199.

Seed of Adam. It is not a specifically religious book; its themes are poetry and love; but in the handling of these subjects Williams makes the religious dimension felt - more clearly and definitely in the case of love than in that of poetry.

The lover in the story is the young man Philip whose 'discovery' of his beloved, Rosamond, is compared explicitly to man's experience of the proximity and ubiquity of God. 'God is a circle, whose centre is everywhere and His circumference nowhere.'[1] But falling in love and discerning God are not merely parallel experiences - one is not simply like the other. The way in which the one is described in terms of the other posits a closer relation between the two than that of mere analogy. Williams makes it clear as the book proceeds that Philip's experience of Rosamond is arousing him to an awareness of another realm of existence which had previously been hidden from him. She is the image of another reality, and the terms used to convey the adoration of Philip so resemble those of Joseph's adoration in Seed of Adam that it is clear that the two experiences are identical. We may note, in passing, that the language of Williams's 'love poetry' is as unconventional as the language of John Donne.

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Williams attributes this saying to Augustine here, but in The Figure of Beatrice he gives Bonaventura as its source. He is in error on both occasions. The phrase, though well-known, has obscure origins and 'appears for the first time in this form in the pseudo-Hermetic Book of the XXIV philosophers, an anonymous compilation of the XIIth century.'
Alexandre Koyre. From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe (New York, 1958), p.279.

> ... now, suddenly, he understood Rosamond's arm when she leant forward to pass a plate to her sister; somehow, that arm always made him think of Downs against the sky. There was a line, a curved beauty, a thing that spoke both to mind and heart; a thing that was there for ever. And Rosamond? Rosamond was like them, she was there for ever ... and then as she stretched out her arm again he cried out that she was perfect, and was more than perfect .... He had seen the verge of a great conclusion of mortal things and then it had vanished.[1]

This writing is metaphysical in the same way that Donne's is. There is no vague maundering about an unidentified emotional experience. The scene is concrete - a common-place middle-class drawing room - and the lover's vision is centred upon a particular physical object, and, furthermore, the intellectual content of the passage demands serious consideration. The fleshly reality is indubitably there and of the utmost importance, yet the 'object' (Rosamond) does not live to itself, nor is it self-explanatory. Williams's use of the curved line of the Downs is not merely a rather grandiose metaphor for an inner and entirely subjective passion; in this context the figure of speech relates Rosamond's arm in a metaphysical way to the material world. Moreover the arm is not merely an object within the material universe, nor are the Downs merely a background setting for Rosamond. The arm and the Downs are, somehow, explanations of each other. Philip feels himself apprehending some kind of meaning in the universe by seeing Rosamond stretching out her arm. One is the image of the other and both are images of God. In the Arthurian poems this basic conception is one

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1 Shadows of Ecstasy (Edition of 1948), p.56.

of the keys to both the imagery and the theology of the two cycles.

In Seed of Adam the speeches of Joseph, though much denser in texture than the meditations of Philip, closely echo this expression of heightened awareness.

> Your hand is the fact of God's O Princess compact of light.[1]
> Babylonia and Britain are only boroughs of you.
> Your look dimensions the world .... [2]

The resemblance is unmistakeable and the repetition of the 'geographical' metaphor is worth noting. Both lovers see in the existence of their beloved the clue to the meaning of the whole physical universe. The beloved both draws attention to herself and points away from herself. This quality is, for Williams, the essential quality of the true image. Rosamond's arm, like Mary's hand, is a 'diagram' of glory and the paradigm of the Divine pattern in the created order. In a more abstract way, Roger, the central character of Shadows of Ecstasy, underlines the point much later in the novel. In theological terms the glory is God's; everything is an expression of His nature and everything that has meaning and value in human life points to Him as the Originator.[3]

In the passage from The Descent of the Dove already quoted in the Introduction, Williams describes theology as 'the measurement of eternity

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1 p.10.

2 p.11.

3 Love too was its image, but love and not the beloved was the necessity; to love, and only to the beloved as the sacred means, the honourable toil was given. Shadows of Ecstasy, p.157.

in operation' - in other words, the plotting of the 'diagram of glory'. It is possible that he conceived of the theologian's task as being, in essence, no different from that of the lover. Both the theologian and the lover penetrate beneath the, apparently, unconnected events and disparate movements of human history and personal life to an apprehension of what is essentially glorious - the pattern of God's activity. But, for the theologian the attempt to grasp the wholeness of the diagram is a lifelong struggle, for the lover this 'measurement of eternity' can be experienced (though not perhaps understood intellectually) in the single, luminous moment of romantic vision. The rest of his life, if he is true to that vision, is spent, as was Dante's, in an endeavour, not to recapture that moment of illumination, but to work out its implications at the level of everyday activity.

Closely connected with the vision of the lover and the theologian is that of the poet, but Williams's treatment of the poetic vocation in Shadows of Ecstasy (the only novel to examine the subject in depth) is ambiguous and, frequently, obscure. The clue to the understanding of his meaning lies in the enigmatic utterances of Nigel Considine: a man of great wealth and mysterious power to whom we are first introduced as a benefactor of the University in which Roger Ingram holds the Chair of Applied Literature. (Unhappily the novel depends for much of its success on the readiness of the reader to believe in Considine). He has endowed a lectureship in 'Ritual Transmutations of Energy', and at one point in the narrative comments on the suicide of a friend in a way that is clearly connected with the grandiose title of the lectureship he has

established.

> I tried to persuade him to live from the depth of his wound rather than to pine away in the pain of it; to make the extent of his desolation the extent of his kingdom. But I failed.[1]

Taken at their lowest level, these remarks might suggest that some kind of 'sublimatory' process is being advised; that Considine was advocating the re-direction of frustrated energies into innocuous and possibly fruitful channels of activity. But the process known to psychologists as 'sublimation' is usually defined as an unconscious one, while the speech indicates an activity of an intensely conscious kind, and of a strangeness that could not be adequately explained in the technical terms of psychology. Furthermore, the subsequent events deal with far more than the transmutation of only human energies. Hidden within and behind the trivial actions and reactions of ordinary human lives lies energies which are more than human - or at least explicable in human terms. The plot revolves around the sudden release of these powers in the world.

Unfortunately, Williams is extraordinarily vague and uncertain about both the origin and the nature of these powers. They are, it is hinted, supernatural, but whether Divine or Demonic in character is never really explained. The ambiguity is focussed in Considine and the novel fails because of the shifting attitudes the author displays towards his creation. Both Isabel Ingram and Sir Bernard Travers refuse the offers of Considine, but Philip, as lover, and Roger as 'poet' are both prepared

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1 Shadows of Ecstasy, p.23.

to accept what is being offered and see possibilities of real power and creative energy. In this sense it is an amoral book. The acceptance or rejection carries no commendation or condemnation.[1]

The name of Roger's chair is connected with the release of energy, and at one stage he speaks specifically about the manifestation of poetic power as he contemplates the books lining his walls.

> "If they came alive," he murmured, "if they are alive - all shut up in their cases, all nicely shelved - shelved - shelved. We put them in their places in our minds, don't we? If they got out of their bookcases - not the pretty little frontispieces but the things beyond the frontispieces, not the charming lines of type but things the type means. Dare you look for them Isabel?"[2]

This rather curious speech seems to be putting forward the view (which is the author's own view) that behind the printed pages there exists an objective reality of which the words of the writer are merely images: that the poet's words do not merely serve to project his own private and peculiar vision but embody an existence of things beyond the reach of ordinary human life - an existence with which the poet, by reason of his vocation, is in contact. Poetry acts, for readers, as the beloved object acts for the lover. The image calls attention to itself but points away from itself to a greater reality. All increased sensitivity, according to Williams, involves not only a heightened awareness of the

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1 Three other novels have the same basic plot structure: War in Heaven (1930), The Place of the Lion (1931), and The Greater Trumps (1932). They differ from the first novel in that the configuration of the 'supernatural' powers is more explicit and the moral issue is faced and dealt with unambiguously.

2 p.44.

natural world but the realisation of another world existing within, beneath, above, and around the world of our sensual perception. The inter-relation of different modes of existence was a constant theme of the early poetry, it is also a dominant theme in all the novels and the 'golden thread' of Williams's systematic theology.

The novels are known, popularly, as 'supernatural thrillers',[1] and the appellation, though appropriate to all seven of them, most accurately describes the second: War in Heaven. The reliance of the narrative on the elements of suspense and surprise makes it the most conventionally 'thrilling'[2] and the framework of the plot is explicitly preternatural. Far simpler than Shadows of Ecstasy, its underlying theme is the eruption into the world of 'telegrams and anger' of cosmic forces and the attempts of men to manipulate these creative and destructive powers to their own ends. We are supplied with all the trappings of magic and witchcraft, and the book is saved from a charge of cheap sensationalism only by a quality of detachment in the tone and the realisation that Williams's description of magical practices is both accurate in its detail and critical in its presentation.

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They are described as such on the dust jackets of at least three of Faber's hard-back editions The Greater Trumps (1964 edition), Descent Into Hell (1961 edition), All Hallows Eve (1966 edition). But John Heath-Stubbs calls them, more accurately, 'metaphysical thrillers', Anne Ridler testifies to Williams's enjoyment of the detective stories of John Dickson Carr (The Image of the City, p.liv).

2

There is even that indispensable element of the modern gangster film, a car chase.

It is a common failure of many who read and admire Williams's novels to overlook the detachment of his writing and to misunderstand the real nature of his attitudes to occult practices. Michael Patermoster, for example, in his historical survey of the place of death in the Christian tradition, typifies this misunderstanding in his brief comment on Williams.

> Williams mingled with his profound understanding of orthodox Christianity an almost perverse interest in witchcraft and its western survivals, which he took very seriously indeed.[1]

It is true that Williams investigated occult practices at some depth; the result of this investigation was the book Witchcraft, published in 1941. But to call this interest 'almost perverse' is simply untrue, as even the most superficial reading of the study should indicate. It is the case, as we have already seen, that he was fascinated by the problem of the relation between the natural and supernatural as well as by any kind of religious ceremonial, but the more sensational aspects of occult practices and the apocalyptic elements of religious belief are used sparingly and only in the service of a strictly literary purpose. The superstitious reader will find no confirmation of his attitudes in any of Williams's books.

For a true understanding of his beliefs in these areas it is necessary to remember the highly sceptical cast of his mind.[2] And in

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1 Thou art there also (London, 1967), p.118.

2 Cf. The remarks of Heath-Stubbs. Charles Williams, pp.13-14. There is also Williams's Office Hymn for the Feast Day of St. Thomas Didymus, Apostle and Sceptic, Divorce, p.105.

this context, a remark made by Anne Ridler is extremely pertinent. Commenting on a childhood production of Longfellow's The Golden Legend by Williams and a friend of his she says

> The conflict between the powers of good and evil, romantically expressed, was always one of Williams's most intense literary enjoyments, but even more deeply felt was the theme of substitution in love.[1] [My italics]

He, who was always highly entertained by the elements of 'suspense' and 'colour' in the writings of others, was fully aware of the fictive possibilities of a cosmic conflict in his own efforts to entertain. I am not suggesting that he did not take angelic and demonic power seriously, but that the picture given is a crude, deliberately romanticised, version of the relationship between good and evil which is painstakingly and profoundly explored on later works like The Figure of Beatrice and Descent Into Hell.

It is probable that the elaborate and esoteric symbolism that Williams sometimes uses tends to mislead many who are acquainted with him only through his novels and poems. Undoubtedly much of this symbolism derives from his experience as a member of the quasi-theosophical society known as the Order of the Golden Dawn. Founded by three Rosicrucians in 1837 it attracted, despite its distinct oddity, a few minds of undoubted calibre. W.B. Yeats and Evelyn Underhill were members, and the anthropologist A.E. Waite introduced Williams to the sect in 1917.[2]

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1 The Image of the City, p.xiii.

2 It must also be mentioned that it attracted the notorious Aleister Crowley, and a description of some of its activities can be found in Symons's biography of Crowley, The Great Beast (London, 1951).

Its ritual seems to have been extravagent and 'syncretistic', hovering uneasily between the religious and the magical, and it is impossible to judge whether Williams took any of the practices seriously or not. In any case, neither he nor Yeats remained members for long, though both used their experience of the Order in various ways in their work.[1] It is clear that the religious beliefs of the society (in so far they had any) had no effect on the structure of Williams's belief, but references to the cultic practices do, from time to time, appear in his books. On the other hand the erudite anthropological works of Waite, The Hidden Church of the Holy Grail (London, 1909) and The Holy Kabbalah (London, 1929) did furnish him with ideas that were to prove fruitful later in life.[2]

That more deeply-felt theme of 'substitution in love', of which Anne Ridler speaks, also appears in War in Heaven, but in a strongly ironic and, what can only be called an entirely negative, way. Towards the end of the sixth chapter Gregory Persimmons indulges in a Satanic ritual the object of which is the possession of the child Adrian. He causes an image of the boy to float before his mind's eye and concentrates his efforts towards control of the boy. In his own bedroom Adrian tosses and turns restlessly in his sleep. Superficially the scene could be one taken from almost any well-written 'horror' story, except that the reader is aware of a seriousness beyond that of the conventional thriller,

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1 An obvious example is the echo of the initiation ceremonies in the fifteenth chapter of War in Heaven.

2 It is unlikely that Williams's interest in the Arthurian legends originated with Waite, but the image of the human body in the Arthurian cycle is possibly the result of reading Waite's books.

and has the sense of a complex metaphysical scheme powerfully backing up the actual presentation of incident. In the first place there is the way in which Persimmons's espousal of evil is described. He negates himself as a sentient and conscious being and is drained of his own will.

> He was divorced now from the universe; he was one with a rejection of all courteous and lovely things; by the oblation of the child he was made one with that which is beyond childhood and age and time - the reflection and negation of the eternity of God.[1]

The significant words in this passage are 'rejection' and 'negation', and the description sets the key for all Williams's serious discussions of the nature of evil. While being fully alive to the squalor and misery of man's experience at the entry into evil he never departs from the classical outline of the Catholic doctrine of evil as provided by Thomas Aquinas in the first part of the Summa Theologica.

> One opposite is known through the other, as darkness is known through light. Hence also what evil is must be known from the nature of good. Now, as we have said above that good is everything appetible, and thus, since every nature desires its own being and its own perfection, it must be said also that the being and the perfection of any nature is good. Hence it cannot be that evil signifies being, or any form or nature. Therefore it must be that by the name of evil is signified the absence of good. And this is what is meant by saying that evil is neither a being nor a good.[2]

Evil is seen, essentially, to have no reality. It is the negation of what is real and good. In the later essay He Came Down from Heaven Williams discusses this at some length and introduces St. Augustine's

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1 War in Heaven (Paperback edition, Faber & Faber, 1962), p.76.

2 Summa Theologica, Pt. I, Q.xlviii, Article I (Translation of 1912, Vol.II, p.262.

statement from the Confessions, 'evil is the privation of good'.[1] But in a remarkable way this incident is a fictional and dramatic prefiguring of that whole discussion. This is also the beginning of what came to be further investigated in the two last novels: the vision of hell and damnation, for the paragraph describing Persimmons's efforts concludes with the simple statement, 'He existed supernaturally, and in Hell....' To have reached hell is to have achieved the state of utter rejection and negation.

The whole incident is, in fact, the obverse of the coin of, to use Anne Eidler's phrase, the doctrine of 'substitution in love'. But this is not immediately apparent, and, probably, does not become apparent until War in Heaven is read in the context of all the other novels. Then it is seen that a similar sleep/dream sequence occurs in Descent Into Hell. In this later work the young woman Pauline Anstruther performs a task which is the direct opposite of Persimmons's. By a deliberate act of willed love she recalls the image of someone else who is undergoing torment, and in doing so relieves the suffering of the other by voluntarily taking it upon herself.[2] In War in Heaven Persimmons, by a deliberate act of willed hatred recalls the image of the boy Adrian and in so doing causes the fears and pains that trouble the child's sleep.[3]

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1 Confessions, Book III, Ch.7.

2 Descent Into Hell, Ch.IX.

3 Cf. A poem by Dylan Thomas who was a pupil of Williams, The Conversation of Prayer.

Underlying both of these incidents is the belief in the essential 'solidarity' of humanity; the concept that at every moment of our existence 'our life and death are with our neighbour';[1] that all separate human beings are involved in the salvation of each other; that each bears a responsibility for others; that all individuals and their actions are inter-related and inter-dependent parts of a complex web of exchange. The final rejection of this pattern of exchange means Hell, and the complete acceptance, Heaven.

Before leaving War In Heaven two further points are worthy of notice. Williams suggests that the clue to the understanding of the true relation between the natural and the supernatural can be found in a sentence from the Athanasian Creed: 'not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God'. In a slightly facetious scene he makes one of the central characters, the Archdeacon, brood on the phrase as he recalls a particularly irritating conversation with his locum about the mechanics of ecclesiastical organisation.

> That the subjects of their conversation should be taken into God was normal and proper; what else, the Archdeacon wondered, could one do with parish councils? But his goodwill could not refrain from feeling that to Mr. Bateaby they were opportunities for converting the Godhead rather firmly and finally into flesh.[2]

The witticism cloaks the serious belief that the most trivial activities of everyday life are capable of transfiguration; that the whole of the natural order is shot through with the glory of God's own life. The

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1 The saying is attributed to St. Anthony of Egypt.

2 p.56.

pattern of God's glory, however, can only be discerned at the personal level by holiness and love.

In the figure of the Archdeacon we are given what must surely have been Williams's ideal of Christian understanding and personal holiness, and it is into the mouth of this character that the author, on three separate occasions, places the aphorism that reaches into the heart of his theology. 'This also is Thou; neither is this Thou'.[1] And this brings us to the second point which claims attention. It concerns the doctrine of images. Whereas, in Shadows of Ecstasy, the question was treated in the person of Rosamond, the treatment here revolves around an inanimate object - an ancient chalice which may be the Holy Grail. The cup reveals itself, startlingly, as a means by which the divine glory can be apprehended.

> He [the Archdeacon] came into the inner room where he had looked at the chalice before he went out that morning, and as he came in it seemed to meet him in sound. A note of gay and happy music seemed to ring for a moment in his ears as he paused in the entrance .... Carrying it as he had so often lifted its types and companions, he became again as in all those liturgies a part of that he sustained ....

But Williams is not content to leave the matter there and a few moments later, with an abrupt and deft change of tone, he asserts the paradoxical corollary of that which he has been postulating

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1 In the Preface to The Descent of the Dove he says

> A motto which might have been set on the title-page but has been, less ostentatiously, put here instead, is a phrase which I once supposed to come from Augustine, but I am informed by experts that it is not so, and otherwise I am ignorant of its source. The phrase is: "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou". As a maxim for living it is invaluable, and it - or its reversal - summarizes the history of the Christian Church.

> "Neither is this Thou," he said aloud, and, coming to the garden door, looked around him.[1]

The image, whatever it may be, is never to be confused with its origin - God, and although Williams gave nearly all his energies to charting the Via Affirmativa - the discovery of God by the apprehension of His presence in created things - he never forgot that there is always the knowledge which comes from the Via Negativa - the denial of the world. He ends the novel in high and colourful style with a Eucharistic scene in which heaven and earth are joined and in which God is adored in and through the things He has made.[2] But before the scene is arrived at, and in a scene that derives directly from the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite and John of the Cross, he presents us with a glimpse of a dark and terrible way in which God can, and for some people, must, be known.

> Steadily and continuously that process went on, till now, as he faced his enemies, he felt the interior loss which had attacked him at other stages of his pilgrimage grow into a final and overwhelming desolation. He said to himself again, as he so often said, "This also is Thou", for desolation as well as abundance was but a means of knowing That which was All.[3]

No-one has been able to trace the origin of Williams's beloved maxim. Certainly he himself did not know its origin, and his reference,

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1 pp.50-51.

2 Almost certainly, Williams has that scene from the Arthurian legends in mind in which the Grail is uncovered to the gaze of the questing knights and Galahad is taken from his companions.

3 <u>War in Heaven</u>, p.240.

in the Preface to The Descent of the Dove, to Augustine as a possible source is a careless one and should be treated with an appropriate scepticism.[1] It is characteristic of Williams to be careless about origins and sources - he did not have the scholar's scrupulous attention to detail. Despite the fact that no sure conclusion can be reached speculation about the aphorism must be regarded as legitimate and useful, as Williams specifically denies having invented it himself. The two phrases of which it is composed contain, on the one hand, the positive Incarnationalism of Dante's attitudes and the Via Affirmativa, and, on the other, the 'negative' mysticism of Dionysius the Areopagite and the Via Negativa. In The Descent of the Dove Williams presents the writings of these two men as perfect descriptions of the Two Ways to God. So the aphorism, in Williams's hands, is thoroughly Christian. But the phrases themselves have a disconcertingly close resemblance to certain well-known mystical sayings that are found, not in the documents of the Christian Church, but in the sacred writings of Hinduism. In the Chandogya Upanishad there is a scene involving the boy Svetaketu and his father. A pattern of sentences occurs as a refrain after each of the father's lessons.

> An invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Truth. THOU ART THAT. (Tat tvam asi).[2]

In a different place, the Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad, the sage, speaking

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1 Preface to The Descent of the Dove. Already quoted.

2 The Upanishads (Penguin translation by Juan Mascaro of 1965), pp.117-118.

of the Soul (Atman) used the phrase 'Neti, Neti'.

> That Soul (Atman) is not this, it is not that (neti, neti), It is unseizable, for it cannot be seized ... etc.[1]

It is not improbable that these famous and striking statements embedded themselves in Williams's memory, and that unconsciously he echoed them in his aphorism, turning them to his own purpose by a process of conflation.[2] There is no indication in any of the writings that he made use of them with anything like their original meaning - or even that he was aware of their original meaning. They are torn from their context and forced together to provide a vehicle for his own interpretation of the Christian doctrine of Creation.

In Many Dimensions, the novel which followed War in Heaven in 1931, the subject of images is little more than a side-issue. Williams is still, as the title suggests, concerned with the inter-relation of different orders of existence, but the framework of a cosmic conflict between good and evil has been replaced by a framework of science-fiction and the ruling theme is that of time. In War in Heaven the Holy Grail was the object by which the conventional barriers of space and nature are transcended: in Many Dimensions a stone, inscribed with the Tetragrammaton

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1 Brihad Upanishad, 3,9,26.

2 Curiously enough the translator and editor of the Penguin translation also brings the two phrases into close conjunction in a comment in his introduction.

> When asked again to express God in words, he (the sage) says: 'Neti, neti', 'Not this, not this; but when pressed for a positive explanation he utters the sublimely simple words: 'TAT TVAM ASI', 'Thou art That.' (p.12).

and thought to have been part of the crown of Solomon,[1] becomes the focal point at which the barriers of past, present and future can be dissolved.[2] The notion of time as a single continuous sequence - a straight line in which the past is irrecoverable and the future non-existent - is challenged. The subject has already been touched on in the early poem Theobald's Road, here it is worked out in greater detail.

J.W. Dunne's book An Experiment with Time has already been mentioned. It first appeared in 1927, four years before Many Dimensions was written, and it is probable that Williams, who was a voracious reader, came across it. This, it must be admitted, is only surmise, for there is no external evidence to show that he had read the book, and although a similarity between Dunne's ideas and those of Williams can positively be asserted, it cannot be claimed that any of the incidents in Many Dimensions took their shape as a direct result of Dunne's conclusions. It has, moreover, to be remembered that argumentation about the real nature of time (like discussion about the real existence of the external world) is a constantly-recurring motif of philosophical exchange, and that interest in the problem had been revived by the publication in 1910

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The idea probably came from Waite's book The Holy Kabbalah in which a miraculous stone, called SCHETHIYA, originally in the throne of God was restored by Solomon when he built the Temple.

> We may not know how to harmonise these references which seem to exhaust all that is said of the stone in the Old Testament, but its connection with other and less fabulous elements belonging to the Zoharic myth of creation resides in the fact that this stone was inscribed with the Divine Name before it was cast into the abyss. (p.229)

2

It should be observed that the stone is far more than a magical talisman and less of an image than was the chalice in War in Heaven. Consequently Chloe Barnett's devotion to the stone gives every appearance of a psychological unbalance. Williams fails to make his concepts of 'service' and 'power' clear enough to convince the reader of the aesthetic or psychological necessity of these attitudes and events.

of Henri Bergson's book Time and Free-Will. Furthermore, specifically scientific aspects of the question were being raised by the investigations of Arthur Eddington and Albert Einstein, and H.G. Wells had popularised the problem in terms of a literary fantasy in The Time Machine. Nevertheless, the ideas expressed in Many Dimensions bear a much closer resemblance to the theories of Dunne than they do to those of anyone else. In their rejection of sequential time both Williams and Dunne suggest that all existence might be simultaneous, so that all actions could be performed contemporaneously (though the apprehension of them remains sequential) at innumerable levels of a different dimension. Dunne erected a complicated (and mathematically improbable) scheme which he called 'serial time'. He maintained that time could only be understood as a series of interlocking and overlapping 'fields' - something in the manner of 'Chinese boxes'.[1]

Williams, naturally, approaches the question from an entirely different angle. As a novelist his primary purpose is imaginative reality and not philosophical consistency, but he does permit one of his characters, Lord Arglay, a quasi-philosophical meditation on the powers of the remarkable stone. This gently probing inquiry extends over three pages and is too long to quote in full, but certain parts of it will demonstrate the correspondence between Williams's imaginative efforts and Dunne's philosophical propositions.

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1 An Experiment with Time (Paperback edition, 1958), pp.158-159.

> For time was the same thing as space, or rather duration was a method of extension - that was elementary. "Extension", he thought, "I extend myself into - what? Nothingness; the past is not; it doesn't exist". He shook his head; so simple a solution had never appealed to him .... Out of existence? That was his difficulty; was it out of existence ... the past might, even materially, exist; only man was not aware of it, time being, whatever else it was, a necessity of his consciousness. "But because I can only be sequentially conscious," he argued, "must I hold that what is not communicated to consciousness does not exist? I think in a line - but there is the potentiality of the plane".[1]

Williams, like H.G. Wells, gets a certain amount of fun out of playing with the metaphysical possibilities opened up by the notion of another dimension. The device of making people appear and disappear has its jocular as well as its serious side. But in at least one respect Williams is more serious than Wells - he does not create an imaginary world into which his characters are projected; the novel is not fantasy. His concern is with the hidden presence of the extraordinary (in other novels more clearly the supernatural) in the ordinary events of human life, and Many Dimensions, like all the other novels, is an attempt to weave these other-worldly experiences into the fabric of everyday existence. For this reason the stone presents moral problems in a way that Wells's Time Machine does not. It represents to some characters (Giles Tumulty and Reginald Montague) a means to the possession of power and wealth, and to others (Lord Arglay and Chloe Burnett) a way of understanding and humility. A moral choice is therefore demanded from every person who comes into contact with the stone. For two of the

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1 Many Dimensions (Paperback edition, 1963), pp.53-54.

characters the choice is ultimate - there is no retreat once it has been made, for death seals it. In the case of Giles Tumulty, Williams begins to develop his concept of hell and damnation and the influence of both Milton and Dante can already be seen. Tumulty's attempt to control and exploit the power of the stone is like Satan's rebellion in Paradise Lost, sheer stupidity. And in the scene of his damnation we find him falling 'from the spirals of time and place' as Satan fell from heaven. And, like the characters of Dante's Hell, Tumulty is forced to endure the torments of his own perversions. The power of the stone draws him, helpless as one of his own specimens, into Itself.

> He remembered; he knew what was to happen, for the merciful oblivion had been withdrawn; he saw himself gathered, a living soul, into the centre of the Stone. That which he had been to men, that by which he had chosen to deal with others, by that he was to be dealt with in his turn .... Above him the light was full of eyes, curious and pitiless, watching him as he had often watched others ...._1

The whole of this paragraph has an imaginative power that makes it one of the most convincing passages in Williams's fictional writing. The power into which Tumulty is irresistibly drawn is described in terms of light, and the dominating image throughout the whole passage is that of light - a traditional Christian symbol for the presence of the Divine. It is possible that here too Williams is showing the influence of Dante, for the whole of Dante's Paradise is a journey through space towards that Eternal Light which is the source of all creation. But for Giles Tumulty,

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1 pp.245-246.

who has rejected the light by deliberate choice, the presence of God can only be experienced as agony and destruction.

> For at once the light and with it the pain passed through him, dividing nerve from nerve, sinew from sinew, bone from bone.

In the later novel Descent Into Hell the same conception of hell and damnation is figured even more vividly in the fate of Lawrence Wentworth.

Towards the end of Many Dimensions Williams describes a scene which harks obliquely back to the question of images as discussed in War in Heaven and points directly forward to one of the most important aspects of The Place of the Lion.[1]

> He (Lord Arglay) saw - even while, rightly wise in his own proper generation among these things, he refused to believe too easily - that the Stone no longer rested on the table but that it threw out of itself colour shaped into the table: the walls and furniture were in themselves reflections of that centre in which they secretly existed: they were separations, forms, and clouded visibilities of its elements, and he also and other mortals who moved among them.[2]

Stylistically the passage is clumsy and, in the context of the novel, unconvincing, but it is interesting for the new slant it gives on Williams's approach to the question of Images. The words 'shaped', 'reflections', 'separations', 'forms' hint at a philosophical system which might be described as Platonic. The same kind of background attitude flickers briefly in the speech from the earlier Shadows of Ecstasy that has already been quoted. But these two passages throw out hints and suggestions only, whereas the sub-structure of the plot of

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1 Published later in the same year.

2 Many Dimensions, p.230.

The Place of the Lion represents a fully developed, though highly idiosyncratic Platonism.

Once again the underlying theme is the inter-relation of the natural and supernatural, but here, in The Place of the Lion, it is plotted along a quasi-Platonic axis of archetypal imagery. Fantastic creatures: a lion, a butterfly, a snake: what might be called 'archetypal beasts', suddenly appear in the quiet English countryside and the hero, Anthony Durrant, after a meeting with one of these creatures enters into an argument with a friend whose bewildered imagination refuses to accept the real existence of anything beyond the phenomenal world.

> "I can't entirely disbelieve it without refusing to believe in ideas," Anthony answered, "and I can't do that. I can't go back on the notion that all these abstractions do mean something important to us. And mayn't they have a way of existing that I didn't know? Haven't we agreed about the importance of ideas often enough?"[1]

Later in the story he struggles, in a similar way, with a similar failure of imagination on the part of his fiancee Damaris Tighe.

> ".... It's the thing that matters: the truth is in the thing. Heart's dearest, listen - the things you study are true, and the philosophers you read knew it. The universals are abroad in the world, and what are you going to do about it? Besides write about them."[2]

Any passage from Plato's Phaedo or The Republic dealing with the problem of Ideas and Reality will demonstrate the fact that the ultimate source

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1 The Place of the Lion (Paperback edition, 1965), p.63.

2 Ibid., p.106.

of Williams's expositions here is the Socratic dialogue. In the seventh part of The Republic, for example, the following dialogue takes place in the course of the discussion on the requirements of the Philosophical Euler. Socrates is the speaker.

> Having established these principles, I shall return to our friend who denies that there is any absolute Beauty or any eternally unchanging Form of Beauty, but believes in the existence of many beautiful things, who loves visible beauty but cannot bear to be told that Beauty is really one, and Justice one, and so on .... Those, then, who are able to see visible beauty - or justice or the like - in their many manifestations, but are incapable, even with another's help, of reaching absolute Beauty, may be said to *believe*, but cannot be said to *know* what they believe.[1]

The 'sensible' things of the phenomenal world are seen as images or shadows of the Forms or Ideas of the real world.

In The Place of the Lion the Ideas themselves, the universals, are released, incredibly enough, into the phenomenal world, and each Form gathers into itself all the images which are the shadowy representations of its ideal being. In Phaedo the relation between the reality and the shadow is described in various ways, one of which is the way of 'participation'. The object receives the Form; it is possessed or occupied by the Idea. This latter notion is precisely what constitutes the plot of the novel. It is clear from the curious scene in which Mr. Tighe witnesses the subsumption of all the phenomenal butterflies into the archetypal butterfly that Williams has at the back of his mind the double-edged concept of 'occupation' and 'participation'. The universals,

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1 The Republic (Penguin Books, 1955), pp.242-243.

having once entered the material world by some unexplained agency, proceed, terrifyingly, to 'recall' their dependent images by taking complete possession of them.

Examples of correspondence between the plot-principles of the novel and Platonic philosophy can be multiplied,[1] but Plato is the ultimate, not the immediate source of these fictional presentations. Viewing the novel as a whole and placing it in the context of the rest of Williams's work, it can be stated with a fair degree of certainty that he approached Plato by way of the Christian interpretations provided by the scholars of the Medieval Church. For example, it is clear from both The Descent of the Dove and The Figure of Beatrice that Williams was well acquainted with the work of Thomas Aquinas, and, while he nearly always singles out the philosopher's Incarnational and Eucharistic doctrines for special comment, he can hardly have been unaware of the Platonism which underlay Thomas's writing. In the First Part of the Summa Theologica (Fifteenth Question) there are passages in which Thomas expounds a theory of Ideas which, because of a basic assumption about the reality of the physical world, is closer in spirit and tone to Williams's attitudes than that of the expositions of Plato himself.[2]

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1 Cf. pp.115-116, p.124.

2 On the contrary, Augustine says, Ideas are principal forms or permanent and immutable types of things, they themselves not being formed. Thus they are eternal, and existing always in the same manner, as being contained in the Divine Intelligence. Whilst, however, they themselves neither came into being nor decay, yet we say that in accordance with them everything is formed that can arise or decay, and all that actually does so.
Summa Theologica, Pt.I, Q.xlviii, Art.I. (Translation of 1912, Vol.I, p.216).

It has been suggested that the Neo-Platonism of thinkers like Philo of Alexandria (30 BC - c.40 AD) and Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 500) might also be regarded as a source for many of Williams's ideas in The Place of the Lion rather than the writings of Plato himself, and the suggestion has much to commend it. Despite the fact that Philo was a Jew and Dionysius a Christian and that nearly four centuries separated them, it is possible to see a common approach to the problem of the relation between the physical world of sense experience and the world of invisible reality; between the Many (a state of experienced division at the level of everyday human experience) and the One (a state of apprehended singleness). Both conceive, in the fashion of Plato, of a set of Ideas or archetypes, pre-existent to the material world, residing in the Divine Mind (in the writings of Philo, residing in, what he calls the Logos)[1] which expresses itself by a process of emanation (προοδος) through the agency of these Ideas. The result is the hierarchy of Creation, the lowest stage of which is the world of matter in all its multiplicity.[2] Correspondences with the plot-principles of Williams's novel can again be enumerated, yet, none of these ideas is

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'The Platonic Ideas are placed in the Logos, so that the Logos is the τόπος or place in which the ideal world (ὁ ἐκ τῶν ἰδεῶν κόσμος) is situated.'
F. Copleston, A History of Philosophy (Bellarmine Series), Vol.I, Ch.XLIV, p.459.
It should be noted that in the eighth chapter of The Place of the Lion the Ideas are frequently referred to in the manner of Philo as 'Angelic Universals'.

2

Cf. Selections from Hellenistic Philosophy. Ed. G.H. Clark, 1940. 'Philo Judaeus', pp.159-183.
Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology. Trans. by C.E. Rolt, S.P.C.K. 1920, Chs.II & IV.

used so logically or consistently that the structure of the thought could be identified as Neo-Platonic. It is possible, further, to trace the distinct features of Gnosticism in The Place of the Lion, not merely because of the many references to emanations and exhalations, to masculine and feminine principles in creation, but because of the emphasis on a way of salvation by the possession of secret knowledge - a theory that Williams seems to repudiate in the closing stages of the book.

It is always necessary to be aware of the dangers which attend the practice of 'source criticism' in the field of imaginative literature. Digging about for theological and philosophical sources in works like novels or poems leads easily and quickly into the realm of the ridiculous; into merely fantastic speculation. The artist does not proceed along the path of the scholar, laying out his sources for inspection and verification, and as his concern is not for this kind of accuracy he usually has no idea whether the sources he uses are either what is termed 'primary' or 'secondary'. Williams is just such an artist - his vagueness about the origin of the ubiquitous maxim 'This also is Thou neither is this Thou' proves the point. If sources are to be unearthed, then mere similarity between one set of ideas and another is not sufficient. As has already been stated, the general shape of Williams's mind, work, and interests must be taken into account. All the evidence indicates the fact that he was deeply immersed in the literature and theology of the Middle Ages and, I believe that his Neo-Platonism, like his Platonism, is derived, not from the original documents, but comes by way of Medieval Christian writers. Furthermore in The Place of the Lion

he provides clues which point in the direction of this conclusion.

There is, first, a great deal of talk about Medieval theology: the title of Damaris Tighe's thesis is Pythagorean Influences on Abelard. The Platonism of Aquinas is referred to, and at one point a scholarly paper is delivered under the title "The Eidola and the Angeli, 'a comparison between the sub-Platonic philosophers on the one side and the commentators on Dionysius the Areopagite on the other.'" More important than all these references however is the single sentence which introduces a philosopher by the name of John the Scot. Williams can only mean the ninth century scholar, John Scotus, sometimes called Erigena. Again whether he had first-hand knowledge of the work of this somewhat obscure figure or not is a matter for conjecture. Nonetheless there is no escaping the fact that the ideas behind the plot of The Place of the Lion owe more to the principles of Erigena's De divisione naturae than they do to any other philosophical system. Even here we must proceed with caution. De divisione naturae, as Copleston is careful to remark, is not easy to interpret 'since the author's attempt to express Christian teaching and the philosophical doctrine of Augustine on the lines suggested by the Pseudo-Dionysius and the Neo-Platonic philosophy leaves room for dispute whether John Scotus was an orthodox Christian or very nearly, if not quite, a pantheist',[1] and Williams's free, though perfectly justifiable, adaptation of the, perhaps only partially understood, system of Erigena makes the task of unravelling the intellectual threads in the

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1 A History of Philosophy (Bellarmine Series, London, 1950), Vol.II, Ch.XII, p.114.

novel particularly difficult.

The 'divisions' of which John Scotus speaks are divisions of process, not divisions of essence, for the basis of his system is a cycle of evolution and involution. Being is seen to originate in a primeval unity and to pass by stages through a world of Ideas (archetypal images) and sensible phenomena (things) back to the original unity.[1] The world of things is said to 'participate' in, or rather emanate from, the world of Ideas, in an utterly dependent way. So the sensible objects of the created world are images of the archetypal image and are destined to return to the archetype, as the archetypes themselves are destined to return to the oneness of the Divine. The full significance of the strange scene in The Place of the Lion in which Mr. Tighe witnesses the absorption of all the individual butterflies into the one great butterfly now becomes apparent. This scene, and the others like it, signifies the beginning of a great Return to Origins.[2]

A fictional presentation obviously cannot rely on the abstractions of philosophy - Justice, Beauty, Strength, Love - to make its impact. Some concretisation is needed, and Williams audaciously concretises his Ideas in the shape of beasts - a Lion, a Snake, an Eagle. But he engages in a neat academic joke by pretending to find justification for these animal representations in the writings of a sixteenth century

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1 Cf. F. Copleston, The History of Philosophy, Vol.II, Ch.XIII, and A.C. McGiffert, A History of Christian Thought (New York, 1953), Vol.II, Ch.VII.

2 The Place of the Lion, p.41.

Christian gnostic whom he conjures up specially for the occasion. A fragmentary manuscript - the address of one Marcellus Victorinus of Bologna to Pope Leo X in 1514 - turns up unexpectedly in a second-hand bookshop, and the novelist produces some passages of delightful pastiche as extracts from this 'sub-Scotist' document are translated and read by one of the characters.

> For by such means the Master in Byzantium ... expounded to us certain of the symbols and shapes whereby the Divine Celestials are expressed, but partly in riddles lest evil men work sorcery .... As it is written : Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels, and the dragon was cast out. Which is falsely apprehended by many of the profane vulgar ... for they ... suppose that the said dragon is himself a creation and manifest existence, and not rather the power of the Divine Ones arrogated to themselves for sinful purposes by violent men. Now this dragon which is the power of the lion is accompanied also by a ninefold order of spectres, according to the composed wonders of heaven .... For though these nine zones are divided into a trinity of trinities, yet after another fashion there are four without and four within, and between them is the Glory of the Eagle. For this is he who knows both himself and the others, and is their own knowledge.[1]

In this exaggeratedly eclectic excerpt it is possible to detect echoes of Philo (the Divine Celestials) and references to the nine orders of angels discussed by Dionysius the Areopagite in his Celestial Hierarchy (the ninefold order of spectres), but the most significant reference is to the last one. This is a repetition and an elaboration of Erigena's own exposition of the activity of the Word of God derived from the

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1 Ibid., pp.92-93.

expositions of Dionysius and the seventh century philosopher Maximus,[1] for the Eagle (nearly always a pictorial image for the Word) plays the same role here as the Word does in Erigena's system.[2] For Erigena, the Ideas, i.e. the 'primordial causes', come into being by means of, and are contained within, the Logos, so that 'in creating primordial causes or principles of essences, God appears to Himself, becomes self-conscious, and creates Himself.'[3]

At the conclusion of the reading from Marcellus Victorinus's manuscript Anthony Durrant experiences a terrifying sense of the dissolution of the known, established world and a bewildering vision of the Sacred Eagle. And at this moment Williams extends the theological position of John the Scot. Man, according to Erigena, made in the image of God is the microcosm of creation; the link between the material and

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Gordon Leff in his study, Medieval Thought. St. Augustine to Ockham, says

> Denys's doctrines became inseparable from the commentary on them by Maximus the Confessor (580-662), and for the middle ages the two went together. Unlike Denys, Maximus was concerned more with the dogmatic and mystical aspects of his outlook; while fully steeped in the Dionysian schema he tried to give it a more directly Christian content.

(Penguin edition of 1965, p.65).

2

'The Word, as with the Neo-Platonism of Denys and Maximus, is the intermediary from the One to the many. It contains all the immaterial archetypes of being, and these are transmitted through the Holy Spirit into actual things, divided into their genera, species, and individuals. Creation, strictly speaking, becomes a procession from God through these first causes or principles into incorporal and corporeal beings.'
Leff, p.69.

3

Copleston, Vol.II, p.127. There is no trace in the novel of that theology of the Logos which was suggested in the play Seed of Adam discussed earlier. The Logos seems to have no direct connection with the world of matter.

the spiritual. Williams goes beyond this to suggest that he is not merely a link but a locus of authority over existences in both worlds. [redacted] He is given mastery over the universals, and in an extraordinary scene towards the end of the novel Anthony assumes the role of archetypal man - Adam - who restores the material world of images to its former pattern by performing again that action of dominion and authority exercised by the original Adam - the naming of the beasts.[1]

One cannot demand philosophical consistency of a novelist - it is not by these standards that a work of art is judged, - but The Place of the Lion, like all five of the early novels, has so many loose ends and ill-fitting parts that one can understand and sympathise with the impatience of George Orwell who said Williams was '... quite unreadable, one of those writers who just go on and on and have no idea of selecting.'[2] The ideas of The Place of the Lion are a jumble of Platonism, Neo-Platonism, magic, Gnosticism, and medieval theology, and one is left wondering how seriously the author was affected by these systems. But beneath the intellectual confusion of the surface the novel expresses a single unshakeable conviction which is unmistakeably Christian in origin and embodiment: the necessity of love as the means of redemption.

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1 Ch.XVI.

2 Letter to Sir Richard Rees, Bt., The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell (1963), Vol.IV, p.504.

Love is treated at two levels in The Place of the Lion. There is the friendship-love of Anthony and Quentin, and the romantic love of Anthony and Damaris. More clearly than in any of the earlier novels love, however variously expressed and experienced, is seen to possess creative and redemptive qualities. At the brink of her destruction, for instance, Damaris is rescued by the sudden realisation of her love for Anthony and of her need for, and dependence upon, him. And it becomes apparent that Anthony's power to assume the character of archetypal man, in the closing pages of the book, and 're-name' creation in imitation of Adam in the Genesis story lies precisely in his own capacity to love. This scene is of particular interest because of its extreme eclecticism. The Neo-Platonist's Ideas and Universals, Philo's Cherubim and Seraphim, Gnostic theories of the power of divine names, these all make their appearance, and Anthony stands before the gathering animal kingdom like a mighty magician casting a spell.[1] But the scene of the naming is concluded in a manner that owes nothing to Plato, Gnosticism or Erigena, but is, uniquely, Williams's own vision of Christian truth.

> All things were named - all but man himself, then the sleep fell upon the Adam, and in that first sleep he strove to utter his name, and as he strove he was divided and woke to find humanity doubled. The name of mankind was in neither voice but in both;

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1 'At each word that he cried, new life gathered, and still the litany of invocation and command went on. By the names that were the ideas he called them, and the Ideas who are the Principles of everlasting creation heard him, the Principles of everlasting creation who are the Cherubim and Seraphim of the Eternal. In their animal manifestations, duly obedient to the single animal who was lord of the animals, they came.' p.202.

> the knowledge of the name and its utterance was in the perpetual interchange of love.[1]

The final phrase shows a broadening and deepening of the concept of love. The significance of the romantic vision is not being abandoned, the experience of a new dimension of love is being added. Approximately a year before the publication of The Place of the Lion, Williams wrote to Alice Hadfield in terms which clearly indicate the way in which his mind was moving. The practical power of love is being discovered.

> The older I get the more amazed I become at the pure convenience of - what we call Love. It is not merely beautiful; it is useful. Which, of course, it said it was all along.[2]

The Place of the Lion shows love to be not merely 'convenient' or 'useful' either. It has authority and actual power and its work is the activity of regeneration. In the last two novels Descent Into Hell and All Hallows Eve the quality of this activity receives a full fictional investigation. The issues there are shown with startling clarity: either one learns to love or one dies. From this aspect these two works may be considered as meditations on the words from the Collect for the Sunday called Quinquagesima which speaks of love as a gift without which 'whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee'.

The last of the early batch of novels, The Greater Trumps (1931),

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Cf. The Figure of Beatrice, p.24.

> love has authority; it communicates and demands charity and humility.

And He Came Down from Heaven, p.124.

> But Adam may have been our name as well as our single father's, we in him and he in us in a state other than sequence. We in him for we were all he. We were all there ....
>
> [My italics].

2

Hadfield, p.139.

need not detain us very long. It repeats, without development, many of the themes of the works already discussed, and the bare bones of the plot are virtually identical with those of The Place of the Lion. Once again the pattern and order of the everyday sentient world is threatened with destruction by the invocation of unearthly forces, and the redemptive, or rather the restorative, action is performed by one who has learned the meaning and power of human love. It can be said in Williams's favour that the character of Nancy Coningsby, Anthony Durrant's counterpart, is more convincingly sketched in that we actually see her growing into the realisation of the meaning of her feelings and attitudes towards her fiance Henry. Of all the motifs that go to make up The Greater Trumps, that of 'images' is the most insistent, and Williams indulges in a nicely ironical knitting together of all the meanings of the word 'image'.

First, at the level of the plot, there are the images painted and drawn on the cards of the ancient Tarot pack and the carved images which are perpetually engaged in the mysterious dance on the table in Aaron Lee's secret room. The paintings act as images of the statuettes, and the figurines themselves as images of cosmic forces lying behind the actions and occurrences of everyday existence. Furthermore the dance in which these images are perpetually moving is, itself, intended as an image of a constantly changing, but meaningfully-ordered, pattern of life. This is not the only place in which the ritual movement of the dance is used as an image with this meaning. In the first of his two major theological essays He Came Down from Heaven Williams describes the

role of Christ in creation in a way that is almost identical with the way he talks of the Fool in the dance of the Tarot figures.

> ... and poised behind Joanna as if he supported and protected her, the vivid figure of the Fool. He had come from all sides at once, yet he was but one. All-reconciling and perfect, he was there, running down the stairs as he had run down the storm.[1]

> The 'sweet reasonableness' of Christ is always there, but it is always in a dance and its dancing-hall is from the topless heavens to the bottomless abyss.[2]

At another level there are, throughout the book, the ordinary things of the material world which act as images in so far as they glow, from time to time, with the invisible presence of a power and a reality greater than themselves. 'It is characteristic of Charles Williams' says John Heath-Stubbs, 'to see the eternal in the common-place ....'[3] and, in a remarkable scene at the beginning of the fourth chapter, Williams demonstrates his vivid perception of the world as a place stranger, more terrifying and more beautiful and wonderful, than the reader had ever imagined it to be. The car conveying the Conings by family out of London is transformed into a chariot; a policeman directing traffic is invested with the sacred power and majesty of an Emperor, and a poorly executed village crucifix, caught in the glare of the headlamps, becomes the living reality of the Eternal Hanged Man. (Needless to say, the Chariot, the Emperor, the Hanged Man are three of

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1 The Greater Trumps (New edition, 1954), p.223.

2 He Came Down from Heaven, p.53.

3 Charles Williams, p.30.

the Greater Trumps and have images on the cards of the Tarot pack).

And at the deepest level of all, there is the 'image' of the Flesh. Williams's delight in, and celebration of, physical beauty in the early poems will be remembered, as will Philip's adoration of the movement of his beloved Rosamond's arm in Shadows of Ecstasy. Here, towards the end of the novel, he fastens on the hand of Sybil Coningsby as the fleshly image of supernatural power and beauty.

> It lay there, very still, the centre of all things, the power and the glory, the palm glowing with a ruddy passion veiled by the aureate flesh - the hand of all martyrs, enduring; of all lovers welcoming; of all rulers summoning.[1]

To see in the figure of the Fool an image of Christ and to read this passage as an imaginative extension of a vision of the Incarnation is merely to recognise the symbolic structure of The Greater Trumps. The novel is more tightly-woven than any Williams had previously produced, and side by side with these concluding passages must be placed the scene in which Nancy, for the first time in her life, begins to grasp the meaning of the obscure phrases of the Athanasian Creed. In church on Easter morning she is brought up suddenly by the line of a commonplace hymn 'Rise to adore the mystery of love', and her thoughts rush on through the course of Morning Prayer to consider the implications of that line in the unfamiliar Quicunque Vult.

> But the second part - and it was of course the setting - for one verse held her. It was of course the setting, the chance that sent one boy's voice sounding exquisitely through the church.

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1 The Greater Trumps, p.227.

> But the words which conveyed that beauty sounded to her full of significance. The mingled voices of men and boys were proclaiming the nature of Christ - "God and man is one in Christ"; then the boys fell silent, and the men went on. "One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God." On the assertion they ceased, and the boys rushed joyously in, "One altogether, not" - they looked at the idea and tossed it airily away - "not by confusion of substance, but by unity" - they rose, they danced, they triumphed - "by unity, by unity" - they fell silent, all but one, and that fresh perfection proclaimed the full consummation, each syllable rounded, prolonged, exact - "by unity of person".[1]

Human love is seen as a symbol of God's way with the world and the glory of fleshly beauty is a representation of the power of His creative activity - to be enjoyed and adored. The full recognition of these facts by the individual Williams came to call the Beatricean vision, and in his full-scale study of Dante's poetry the meaning of this moment of realisation is explored at every level. But here in The Greater Trumps the author is content merely to point out that the clue to the understanding of the bewildering beauty of a fleshly reality is only to be found in the Incarnation, and that, in turn, the true approach to the meaning of the Incarnation can come only through the recognition that the ordinary flesh of human experience can be the locus for the revelation of supernatural splendour.[2]

This 'incarnational' assertion lies at the very centre of Williams's

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1
Ibid., pp.109-110. We recall the meditations of the Archdeacon in War in Heaven (Ch.V). The Athanasian Creed had peculiar significance for Williams, and it is characteristic of him that he should take such intense delight in a set of abstract formulae.

2
This assertion by no means calls in question the validity of the Via Negativa.

systematic theology. It is the reference point for every statement he makes about Grace, Free-Will, Sin and Salvation. And it is precisely at this point that, for all his interest in forms and images, the Platonic and Gnostic trappings of some of his writings, he diverges radically from Gnostic and Plato. The sheer 'isness' of the material world is always present to his sensibility. The speech, for example, from The Symposium in which Socrates would have his listeners ascend, by stages, from the enjoyment of physical beauty to the contemplation of absolute beauty is built on a presupposition which Williams would have found utterly unacceptable.

> What may we suppose to be the felicity of the man who sees absolute beauty in its essence, pure and unalloyed, who, instead of a beauty tainted by human flesh and colour and a mass of perishable rubbish, is able to apprehend divine beauty where it exists apart and alone?[1] [My italics]

As Williams makes clear in The Figure of Beatrice the things of the material world may be images; the living flesh may point beyond itself to the Eternal glory, but the images possess their own reality and the flesh its own splendour. It might be said that Williams is merely stating the orthodox Christian position on the Incarnation (and Williams himself would have seen little merit in mere 'originality', still less in heterodoxy) but his emphasis on the beauty, splendour and significance of the flesh makes him a distinctive thinker in his own generation, and places him in the company of that very small band of Latin Christians who have adopted so positive a stand.

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1 The Symposium (Penguin Translation), p.95.

Before passing on to Williams's literary criticism, it might be useful to indicate briefly what he intended in his frequent use of the word 'flesh'.

Over the centuries the word has suffered so many interpretations and become so encrusted with diverse, and sometimes conflicting, associations that it is difficult to allow a fresh interpretation to speak for itself, especially one essentially so simple as Williams's. It must first be distinguished from the understanding offered by Paul the Apostle. In the famous passage from his letter to the Galatians Paul enunciates the principles of his interpretation.

> Walk in the Spirit, (πνεύματι) and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh (ἐπιθυμίαν σαρκος). For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary to one another: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.[1]

The Apostle is confronting his readers with two opposing modes of human life, two kinds of existence, he is not drawing a Platonic distinction between soul and body. In listing among his 'sins of the flesh' such things as idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, heresies etc. as well as adultery and fornication his intention is made quite plain. It is not to place a dichotomy between a non-corporeal essence and a material substance in the individual human being, but to demonstrate the conflict within the personality, which might, of course, sometimes manifest itself in physical ways. This is the consistent pattern of Paul's thought and it

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1 Ch.V, vv.16 ff.

is primarily the interpretation that underlies the use of the word 'flesh' in the ninth Article of the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion, of the Book of Common Prayer.[1] This metaphorical and subtle use of 'flesh' is not Williams's use.

At the other extreme his attitudes are sharply, and obviously, distinguishable from those of the several species of Manicheeism which, by various paths, have found their way into much of the moral teaching of the Church in the West. The basis of such teaching is precisely that distinction between spirit and matter which Paul refuses. It places sin firmly in the lusts of the physical body and evil in the matter of creation.[2] Williams's rejection of this idea of the flesh in The Descent of the Dove as well as essays like 'Sensuality and Substance' and 'Natural Goodness' is unambiguous and total.

Augustine of Hippo was, as we shall see, the source of many of Williams's attitudes, but on the use of the word under discussion his writings can take us only some of the way. He seems to stand halfway between the two positions already described, veering sometimes in the direction of the Manichaeans by speaking of concupiscence as a revolt of

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'And this infection of nature (Original Sin) doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in the Greek, φρόνημα σαρκὸς which some to expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire of the flesh is not subject to the Law of God'.

2

'The all-important thing was to withdraw oneself from the contamination of the flesh, matter being the fundamental evil.'
J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (1968 Edition, p.9).

the flesh against the spirit and condemning sexual desire with a ferocity that has alienated many from his writings,[1] and at other times adopting a strictly Pauline position in his stern condemnation of Manicheeism.

> What is evil is the will's aversion from the changeless Good and its conversion to the goods that are changing; and this aversion and conversion, being voluntary and not compelled, is followed by the fit and just punishment of misery.[2]

But it is possible to find in Augustine a use of the word 'flesh' which leads us in the direction of Williams's own. In a meditation on the statement from St. John's Gospel 'the flesh profiteth nothing' he has the following to say:

> So too now, 'the flesh profiteth nothing', but this means of itself. Let the spirit be added to the flesh, as charity is added to knowledge, and it profiteth much. For if the flesh profiteth nothing, the Word had not been made flesh that it might dwell in us .... But it is through the flesh that the Spirit acted for our salvation. The flesh was the vessel.[3]

For Augustine here, as for Williams at all times, the word 'flesh' simply means the physical body, a material substance of the universe which is apprehended by the senses. But, as we shall see, in the essays 'Sensuality and Substance' and 'Natural Goodness', as in the

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1 '... there is a certain laudable natural instinct in a man's shamefacedness, to abstain from using that lust (though it tend to propagation) upon such as propinquity has bound him chastely to respect, seeing that blameless wedlock is ashamed of this very act.' City of God, Bk.XV, Ch.xvi (Everyman Translation).
'But I am rather of their mind that hold a resurrection in both sexes, for there shall be none of that lust, which caused man's confusion ....' City of God, Bk.XXII, Ch.xvii.

2 Quoted by John Burnaby in Amor Dei (1938), Ch.VII, p.185.

3 An Augustine Synthesis, (Arr. by E. Przywara, 1936), Ch.VII, p.186.

Arthurian poems, Williams is prepared to go a good deal further than Augustine (and, of course St. John) in the matter of the 'profit' of the flesh. A belief in a natural holiness and beauty residing in the flesh has already been hinted at in the novel The Greater Trumps.

And in this matter Williams seems prepared to go even beyond the position of his mentor, Dante, whose words and ideas can frequently be heard echoing in the very cadences of Williams's own writing. Nonetheless Williams owes more to Dante than to any other Christian thinker, and it cannot be doubted that his own doctrinal formulations are inspired by the lead that Dante gives in the fourteenth canto of the third part of The Divine Comedy.

> Its brightness with our fervour shall keep pace,
> Fervour with sight, sight so enlarge the mesh
> Of its own worth as it hath more of grace;
>
> And when we put completeness on afresh,
> All the more gracious shall our person be,
> Reclothed in the holy and glorious flesh.[1]

Dante, of course, is speaking of the beauty and holiness of the resurrected body: Williams uses these images to describe the mortal body in the later poems and in The Figure of Beatrice.

Literary Criticism.

The first five novels were produced at a remarkable speed - within the space of the three years between 1929 and 1932 - and, despite their

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1 The Divine Comedy. Paradise. Canto XIV. 11 40-46. (Penguin Translations).

theological intricacies, were intended primarily as entertainments for the reader and as a means of making money for the author. It is plain that Williams could not help being preoccupied with the everyday financial difficulties which beset a relatively poorly paid editorial assistant. Shakespeare, he was (quite unjustifiably) convinced, was constantly oppressed by financial burdens. It is possible that this need to earn money was one of the reasons for his being employed by the London County Council as a lecturer, in English Literature, to evening classes at the City Literary Institute and the Dalham Commercial Institute.[1] But Williams was not a snob, and the need to earn money in no way detracted from the enthusiasm and committedness with which he pursued his course of lectures. Among the pupils attending those classes in the late twenties was a young man who was to become a far more prominent figure in the literary world than Williams - Dylan Thomas. And Anne Ridler recalls an occasion when after some kind of literary party, Thomas remarked to his teacher, 'Why, you come into the room and talk about Keats and Blake as if they were alive.'[2]

The first volume of Williams's literary criticism concerned poets who were alive. It was published by the Oxford University Press in 1930 under the title Poetry at Present and was a set of essays on the work of sixteen contemporary poets. It was an inauspicious beginning to

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1 Hadfield, p.59.

2 The Image of the City, p.xx.

a career as a literary critic, for the volume bears all the marks of a run-of-the-mill hack-work. Williams was obviously working to a commission, and the poets chosen for criticism hardly brought out the best in him. He did not understand T.S. Eliot and barely touched on the more recent poems of W.B. Yeats. W.H. Davies and Lascelles Abercrombie are treated with more enthusiasm than critical judgment, and an elegant obscurity of style hides the essential triteness of his observations on the work of Bridges, Masefield and Gibson. De la Mare seems to have been the only poet to elicit a genuine response and a more than superficial evaluation, and even here, the essay is marred by a preciousness and a vague air of condescension.

No more critical work appeared for two years, then two volumes, united by a preoccupation with similar problems, were published in quick succession: The English Poetic Mind (1932) and Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind (1933). His criticism is quite unlike that of any other person or school in the twentieth century and the ambivalent attitude of most readers to these two volumes is nicely expressed by Basil de Selincourt in a review of Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind that was printed in The Observer shortly after the book's appearance.

> I confess that Mr. Williams's theories and combinations which I only partly understand, leaves me often sceptical and uneasy; and while I admire the tempestuous thoughts he utters and the impetuous onset of his attack, as he takes the successive heights by storm, I wish he need not fluster in the intervals, that the sea, when it is not rough, need not be choppy, that he could more often say the straight-forward thing straight-forwardly. No-one can be original at every turn.[1]

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1 The Observer, December 17, 1933.

What de Selincourt says about the second volume applies equally to the first, though the last sentence imputes an attitude which Williams never possessed and for which there is no evidence in these works of criticism. They are not the products of a man who was intellectually vain. The faults do not lie in the conceited desire to show originality at every turn, but rather in a self-indulgence and a sheer lack of intellectual discipline. One feels the pressure of a powerful mind and, at times, an almost visionary imagination, but the writing is careless and slip-shod. Williams has not taken the trouble to make his vehicle of communication adequate to the weight it has to bear. Consequently the writing wavers unhappily between density and vacuity. The first chapter of The English Poetic Mind, for example, contains one of the most penetrating passages of general poetic criticism that exists in modern letters, but many of the remarks on the last plays of Shakespeare seem to have very little, or perhaps entirely private, meaning.[1]

As the titles of both volumes indicate, the books are an attempt to explore the hidden springs of creative power arising in the imagination of the artist. The relevance of this critical activity to Williams's systematic theology may not be immediately apparent, but careful examination reveals a close connection between his aesthetic evaluations and his religious vision. Despite its variety, there is an essential unity of thought and belief in all Williams's work. Each piece,

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1 'The elemental simplicities of the last plays, the facts of being uttering their essential nature, alone remain.'

whatever its subject, is evidently the product of a man using every aspect of his knowledge as well as his entire sensibility to get to the heart of the matter in hand. It is necessary, however, to be aware of the complexity of the process by which this unity is achieved. This is not a simple case in which a theological system is imposed, willy-nilly, upon critical judgment, (or historical investigation) nor one in which an aesthetic theory determines theological perspective; the process is reciprocal. On the one hand, for example, his immersion in the work of great artists provides him with certain insights about human behaviour which affect the bias of his theological statements, and, on the other hand, his personal experience of God in the Church and history forms a clear apprehension of life which is then discovered to be confirmed in the creative vision of the artists. Evidence for this reciprocity can be seen in the comparison of statements in The English Poetic Mind with certain passages from the Introduction to his edition of the Letters of Evelyn Underhill.

It will be remembered that the last volume of Williams's early poetry showed an increased awareness of the pain and horror of human existence. The English Poetic Mind translates this apprehension into new terms - the terms of literary criticism. The book is a study of the ways in which three of the greatest English poets, Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth recognise a particular manifestation of pain and horror and use it as a source of creative power.[1] Towards the end of the volume

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1 Cf. Shadows of Ecstasy, Ch.II.
Considine paused for a moment .... 'I tried to persuade him to live from the depth of his wound rather than to pine away in the pain of it; to make the extent of his desolation the extent of his kingdom.' (p.28).

Williams summarises his purpose in the following way:

> In Shakespeare then we have the poetic mind imagining union in contradiction, and afterwards contradiction in union; and after that finding itself capable of imagining fact and almost non-human existence. In Milton we have the poetic mind imagining its knowledge of union in contradiction, and afterwards its knowledge of contradiction in union. In Wordsworth we have the poetic imagining union in contradiction, and afterwards a life which had to be lived under the shadow of that contradiction.[1]

The experience under discussion can only be defined as the sudden awareness that the world at times reveals itself to be utterly different from one's usual perception of it; that there is a contradiction at the heart of things; that what has been taken securely and lovingly for granted suddenly reveals itself as its apparently impossible opposite. Thirteen years later when Williams came to edit Evelyn Underhill's letters he discussed the identical experience, not in terms of the creative vision of the artist, but in those of the spiritual life of a deeply religious, highly sensitive woman.

> One is apparently left to live alone with an Impossibility. It is imperative, and in the end possible, to believe that the Impossible does its own impossible work; to believe so, in whatever form the crisis takes, is of the substance of faith, ... But before the resolution of the crisis, whatever that may be, it is necessary to live with that Impossibility.
>
> She had, in her earlier days, experienced the impact of the Impossible. The only proper result of that, in any life, is to accept the working of the Impossible alongside such possibilities as it condescends to create.
>
> She never forgot the one, but she never refused the other. To call such obedience - whether it takes place in religion, in

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1 p.173.

> politics, in any love-affair, or whatever - a compromise is to underrate in her as in others, both the fidelity and the labour. It is necessary to maintain both, as and how the Impossible decrees.[1]

The capacity to recognise and accept the darkness and contradictions of human experience is seen to be, in the artist, a source of immense creative power, and, in the ordinary individual person, the root of wonderful spiritual growth, for however he chooses to delineate the experience, Williams clearly sees it as universal. To be fully human is to acknowledge the impact of contradiction. The curious words from the first novel Shadows of Ecstasy echo in these passages, '... to make the extent of his desolation the extent of his kingdom ... to live from the depth of his wound.'[2] And in a peculiar little morality play called The Death of Good Fortune, written four years before the Introduction to Evelyn Underhill's letters, we find these same assertions transposed into the key of verse-drama.[3] But the passages quoted are not only about artistic power and personal spiritual growth, behind them lie theological issues and doctrinal problems (in this case a particular experience of evil which he calls contradiction) and Williams's unceasing attempt to find a coherent pattern in the disparate events of human life and the,

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1 The Letters of Evelyn Underhill (London, 1943). Introduction, p.15.

2 See above, p.96.

3
> The Lover. That is it! That is it! all luck is good.
> Why did you tell me to be resigned? Fool!
> Why did no one tell me? - all luck is good.
> The Girl. Dare you say it?
> The Lover. Dare you not believe it? up!
> bear with me and say that all luck is blessed.

(Collected Plays, p.192).

frequently puzzling, experience of God. The means at his disposal were various: poetic, historical, discursive, dramatic, but the same intention underlies almost every work: the definition of that pattern of thought and belief which can, most conveniently be called a systematic theology.

He himself was convinced, as we have seen, that the secret, or more properly, one of the secrets, of the pattern lay in the understanding of the aphorism 'This also is Thou: neither is this Thou'. And he suggested, somewhat elliptically, that his account of the history of the Christian Church might be read in terms of the statement. The Descent of the Dove does not lend itself easily to this interpretation, whereas The English Poetic Mind can hardly be interpreted in any other way. Its terms are those of literary criticism, but its concern is to show how the human personality endures the actual experience which the paradox in some measure describes. In the lives of three great creative artists - Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth - the experience of contradiction - loss of vision, emptiness, failure, death - is seen to be suffered in the depths of the imagination; is seen to be recognised and accepted in such a way that it becomes a source of power by which the original completeness of vision is not merely recovered, but returns transformed by the new knowledge into something 'rich and strange'.[1]

The pivotal point of Williams's study is his examination of what he called the 'Troilus-experience'. In Troilus and Cressida Shakespeare

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1 The use of the quotation is not accidental. Williams regarded The Tempest as a presentation of this transformation experience.

objectifies the shattering fact of contradiction and human failure to accept the sudden loss of a world which has been taken for granted. In the scene where Troilus is forced to witness the infidelity of Cressida we find an appalling parody of the aphorism 'This also is Thou: neither is this Thou',

> This she? no, this is Diomed's Cressida.
> . . . . . .
> This is not she. O madness of discourse,
> That cause sets up with and against itself;
> . . . . . this is and is not, Cressid.[1]

Troilus's incapacity to deal with this abrupt contradiction of his life is the source of the tragedy: it drives him to a kind of insanity and interior destruction. Williams's criticism gives the impression that Shakespeare was haunted by this subject, and he sees Hamlet as an extension of Troilus.

> He is throughout in very much the state that Troilus was to find himself in after he had seen Cressid with Diomed; the world is executing an appalling outrage on his being.[2]

And at the end of Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind he returns to the problem of Hamlet with an extended comment on 'the actual schism in reason': the unbearable endurance of conflict and division experienced within the confines of a single personality.[3]

> His criticism of Tennyson in the closing chapter of The English Poetic Mind hinges on the failure of the Victorian poet to accomplish

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1 Troilus and Cressida, Act V, Sc. ii.

2 The English Poetic Mind, p.68.

3 p.131.

what Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth had all, with varying degrees of success, been capable of; the imaginative reconciliation of the experienced contradiction.[1] The poems of the Idylls of the King are condemned as muddled and afraid. For one brief moment a real insight into the human condition flares in the verse: in Lancelot's speech from the section called 'The Holy Grail'. But the poet retreats from the pain and the difficulty into a stilted formalism. Tennyson's mind '... could not enter deeply into man's sense of outraged being; it could not pursue Lancelot's mind into the dark places, and therefore it could not discover reconciliation.'[2] It is impossible to overlook the emphasis on the word 'therefore' or to consider its use accidental; the inferences are plain. In the first place Williams believed that the greatest art was born out of the deep awareness of, what he called contradiction and the consequent achievement of reconciliation. For this reason the plays of Shakespeare occupy a place of importance in his life. And for this reason his own imagination is dominated by the poetic achievement of Dante. In a way that is deeper and clearer than any other, The Divine Comedy explores the meaning of the 'actual schism' and the achieved reconciliation - the loss of Beatrice, the dark wood, the descent through Hell, the journey up the mountain of Purgatory, the recovery of Beatrice, the vision of Paradise.

But the word 'therefore' carries us even further - into Williams's

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1 See Appendix II.

2 The English Poetic Mind, p.190.

theological apprehensions. It implies a belief in the universality of that experience of contradiction. It might not occur in other human lives as it occurred in Evelyn Underhill's; and the poetry of Shakespeare and Dante present only the identifiable image of it, but the experience is not confined to 'religious' or 'creative' people, it is built into the structure of existence. In consequence the statements of these books of criticism indicate the framework around which Williams was constructing his doctrines of the Fall and Redemption. The full exposition of these doctrines is presented in the two theological essays He Came Down from Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins, and so the full discussion of them will be left for the next chapter, but it should be noticed in this context that when Williams comes to deal in specifically theological terms with specifically theological subjects, the sounds of these two critical works vibrate in nearly every paragraph. The discussion of the Fall, for instance, centres not upon the problem of the act of disobedience but on the nature of knowledge; not on the cause of the act but on its consequences.

> The nature of the Fall - both while possible and when actual - is clearly defined. The 'fruit of the tree' is to bring an increase of knowledge. That increase, however, is, and is desired as being, of a particular kind. It is not merely to know more, but to know in another method.[1]

This is nothing more, nor less, than a full theological exposition of the remark about the way in which man's perception is seen to be 'horribly

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1 He Came Down from Heaven, p.19.

doubled' in Hamlet; an elaboration of the idea of the 'actual schism in reason'. Troilus lives out the consequences of the Fall in the tragedy; Williams describes the consequences in the terms of the loss of his own imaginative power.

We seem to have come a long way from the aphorism 'This also is Thou; neither is this Thou', and yet what else can it be than the expression of a recognition of duality in man's awareness of himself, the world, and God? Its meaning can be extended to imply all that has been discussed. The contradiction which entered the structure of being at the Fall cannot be escaped; it has, mysteriously, to be lived, and the aphorism points the way to the acceptance and transcendence of division. God is to be known both by His presence and His absence. His image which has been recognised, and affirmed, in fleshly terms can be withdrawn (as in the case of Troilus with Cressida and, in real life, of Dante with Beatrice) and the experience of desolation itself be affirmed as a means of knowing God. The final note, however, is one of reconciliation, and the exact outlines of this reconciliation are to be found in all the major works of Williams's last years.

CHAPTER III

1937 - 1938

The third of the five chronological divisions of Williams's works covers a period of little more than eighteen months, but it merits special attention for it can be seen quite clearly as a kind of 'watershed' in his creative life. With the publication of Descent Into Hell in 1937 and Taliessin Through Logres and He Came Down from Heaven in 1938 Williams established his first real claim for serious consideration as a major talent in the fields of literature and theology. These books may be disliked but they cannot be ignored. To speak of a 'watershed' is, probably, to invite the misunderstanding that his work falls neatly into two distinct parts and that a break in continuity occurs round about 1937. This is not, of course, the case: there is no question of sudden change or discontinuity: the question is one of distillation and refinement. The date is not arbitrarily chosen for, viewed as a whole, the work of the last eight or nine years of Williams's life shows qualities of coherence and consistency that had previously been lacking. The uncontrolled exuberance of the early years - coupled with the urgently-felt need to earn money - had frequently led to 'off-the-cuff' work that was superficial, verbose and careless. After the mid-thirties

his writing was to show a more consistently-controlled intelligence and a purposive seriousness, and it is impossible to dismiss any of the substantial pieces of these later years with the same ease and confidence with which one passes over, for example, Poems of Conformity, A Myth of Shakespeare or Poetry at Present. Almost every literary activity (reviews, plays, novels, poems, essays) exists for the single purpose of acting as a vehicle for the promotion of a unique vision of life.

In no place is this change more evident than in the poetry. And here it is necessary to draw attention, not merely to distillation and development, but to a pronounced and startling contrast between the early volumes and the Arthurian cycles. The first volume Taliessin Through Logres, was published in 1938, the second, The Region of the Summer Stars, six years later in 1944, but they are, in fact, part of the same sequence which Williams had been working on since 1930. The exact chronological order of composition is impossible to determine, though C.S. Lewis suggests that most (perhaps all) of the lyrics that make up the second volume were written after Taliessin Through Logres.[1] Quite properly, Lewis regards the question of compositional chronology as of relatively little importance, and arranges the sequence according to a narrative order. It is clear that the two volumes cannot be treated in separation from one another and so the detailed examination of both will be deferred to the final stage of this study. There is a further argument for

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1 Arthurian Torso, containing the Posthumous Fragment of The Figure of Arthur by Charles Williams, and a commentary on the Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams by C.S. Lewis (1948). Lewis deals with the question of chronology in his opening chapter.

deferring discussion: in a remarkable way, the cycles embody nearly all Williams's cardinal theological principles so that close attention to the poetry will provide the most comprehensive picture of his systematic theology.

He Came Down from Heaven.

It is easy to approach Williams's first substantial theological work with the wrong presuppositions. The title prepares the reader for an essay on the Incarnation whereas the book is primarily concerned with reconciliation and redemption - an essay on the Atonement. But Williams's starting-point in considering the doctrine is not the death of the historical person Jesus, it is the Word made Flesh, and it is one of the strengths of his systematic theology that he never, even for purposes of organisational convenience, separates the categories of Incarnation and Atonement in his investigation into the life and purpose of man. This particular way of approaching the dogmas of Christianity is intimately bound up with the fact that his imagination and mind are rooted in the belief in the Transcendental and its constant penetration into the world of everyday experience. Just as, in The Descent of the Dove he describes theology as 'the measurement of eternity in operation' so here in He Came Down from Heaven he describes religion in a similar way: as 'the definition of the relationship between earth and heaven'.[1]

The book is as unlike a work of academic, or, for that matter, of

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1 p.12.

popular theology as can be imagined, and before the reader is able to deal with the difficulties that arise naturally out of the complexity of the thought, a more baffling problem has to be overcome: the problem of 'style'. It is always misleading to interpret style - as most people are prone to do - as a kind of top-dressing; an elegant or pleasing clothing of a self-sufficient body - called the 'content'. Style and content are organically linked with one another rather as 'substance' and 'accidents' are linked. The distinctiveness of a writer's style arises out of the very nature and structure of his apprehension of reality, and 'style' is intended to convey the particular and unique means by which an individual sensibility makes itself known. Williams's style is that of an artist and, as has already been pointed out, his work will remain incomprehensible to those incapable of recognising the fact. Consequently the prose style of all three of his specifically theological works differs from that of most theologians (and all his contemporaries) in one vital aspect - it possesses a quality that can only be described as poetic density. His literary techniques are not those of discussion, argumentation, or divulgence of information, but those of irony, allusion and suggestion. None of these essays presents any factual information which is not well-known, and Williams does not construct arguments from these facts, he re-organises them, presents them in new relationships, arranges them like poetic images and mathematical symbols to form the desired 'suggestive' pattern. The contemporary theologian, like the contemporary philosopher and historian, leaves nothing unsaid: he sees his task as one in which the investigation,

argument, point of view, must be presented with as much logic, openness and lack of mystery as can be mustered. Williams's writing deliberately leaves things unsaid and depends for its effectiveness on the reader's sensitive awareness of what has been omitted. The words on the paper are only ciphers - the tip of the iceberg which indicates layers of meaning hidden, but present, beneath the surface. Each word counts, and has to be accepted and responded to in the imagination as well as the mind. The reader is required to exercise a different, and more difficult because more complex, attention to writing of this kind.

Perhaps the easiest way in to the understanding of this problematical book is to be found via the back door of the two earlier works of literary criticism. I have already tried to show how Williams handles the theme of contradiction (the 'Troilus-experience') in the first of these two books, The English Poetic Mind, and how it might be related to the aphorism 'This also is Thou: neither is this Thou'. It is not so central an issue in Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind, but moves like a ground-swell beneath the surface preoccupations. There are, however, a few occasions when the theme is treated directly, and these show Williams extending the concept of 'outraged being' in a theologically significant way - a way which leads into his treatment of sin in He Came Down from Heaven.

> But what Shakespeare is doing from Hamlet onwards is two-fold: he is exploring the actual schism in reason, [my italics] and pressing it as much farther as he can. The perception of man is hereafter horribly doubled.[1]

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1 Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind, p.131.

The subject under discussion is the creative development of an artist, the context is the Shakespearian canon and the vocabulary is that of literary criticism. Aesthetic evaluations must be seen for what they are - it is dangerous, and stupid, to confuse Art with Life, but it is equally stupid to pretend that there is not an intimate connection, and Shakespeare's presentation of contradiction embodies a real understanding of the human condition. What Williams seems to have found in Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth is confirmation and illumination of his own perceptions. The situation already experienced by Williams (as some of the early poems show) is seen to underlie the 'problem plays' and tragedies of Shakespeare,[1] Milton's Paradise Lost, and Wordsworth's The Prelude. The 'actual schism in reason' becomes the starting-point for his own theological exposition of the doctrine of Original Sin.

In the second chapter of He Came Down from Heaven he examines the Genesis myth of creation and the Fall, and here a remarkable fact emerges. Williams was not trained in the fields of either dogmatic theology or Biblical criticism: he was, on the other hand, an experienced literary critic and a devotee of Milton (he had already written one substantial essay on Milton and was to edit the World's Classics edition of Milton's English Poems for the Oxford University Press)[2] and one would have expected him to be, at the least, tainted by the common English error of

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1 Especially Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, Othello, and Hamlet.

2 The first essay appeared in The London Mercury, July 1937, under the title The New Milton. The World's Classics edition was published in 1940.

reading the original story through the spectacles of Milton's re-creation in Paradise Lost. This tendency he completely avoids: his attention is fixed on the biblical account, and, in his remark on theories of a pre-cosmic Fall at the beginning of the chapter, he shows himself fully aware of the extensive influence Milton's reconstruction has exercised over English religious sensibility since the seventeenth century.

> Our own awareness of this explanation [of evil] is generally referred to the genius of Milton, who certainly shaped it for us in great poetry and made use of it to express his own tender knowledge of the infinite capacity of man's spirit for foolish defiance of God.[1]

The main outlines of Milton's version are, of course, traditional to Western Christianity which, to a large extent, follows the Augustinian elaboration of the Genesis story.

> But after that proud and therefore envious angel fell through that pride from God unto himself, and chose to rule in a tyrannical vainglory rather than be ruled, ... desiring to creep into man's mind by his ill-persuading subtlety, and envying man's constancy in his own fall, he chose the serpent ... a creature slippery and pliable, wreathed in knots fit for his work. This he chose to speak through, abusing it, as subject unto the greater excellency of his angelical nature; and, making it the instrument of his spiritual wickedness, through it he began to speak deceitfully to the woman ....
>
> (City of God, Bk.XIV, Ch.II)

And Augustine closes the chapter with the words:

> Though they were not both seduced, they were both taken in sin and made the devil's captives.[2]

The quotation of this passage out of the context of the complete

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1 He Came Down from Heaven, p.18.

2 City of God, Bk.XIV, Ch.II (Everyman trans. Vol.II, pp.41 & 42).

discussion of sin and evil in the City of God is, to some extent, to misrepresent Augustine's position, for the cardinal action of his interpretation as a whole is not the serpentine temptation of the devil, but the wilful disobedience of Adam and his wife. Nonetheless it is clear that Augustine saw the devil playing a prominent part in man's tragic fall from that state of innocence and beauty known as Original Righteousness, and that the Augustinian reconstruction has passed into the mainstream of Western Christendom's belief about the matter.[1] It is precisely this role of the devil which Milton chose to emphasise in Paradise Lost, giving to the fallen archangel a position of ambiguous centrality in the account, and despite the fact that Williams is prepared to follow Augustine on so many other matters (he quotes from the Confessions in this same chapter), it is precisely the role of Satan, in both Augustine's reading and in the Miltonic augmentation, which Williams uncompromisingly rejects.

> The popularity of the legend [the fall of Satan] has perhaps been assisted by the excuse it has seemed to offer for mankind, by the pseudo-answer it has appeared to offer to the difficulty of the philosophical imagination concerning a revolt in the good against the good, [the actual schism in reason] and by its provision of a figure or figures against whom man can, on the highest principles, launch their capacities of indignant hate and romantic fear. The devil, even if he is a fact, has been an indulgence ....[2]

This is a passage of extreme significance: it sets the tone for Williams's

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1 The examination of the ancient Passiontide liturgy of the Western Church yields abundant evidence of this fact.

2 He Came Down from Heaven, p.18.

own reconstruction of the myth and places certain aspects of the novels and plays in a curious perspective. Williams is freer in his handling of the Genesis myth than both Augustine and Milton for, in addition to the rigid exclusion of the devil from Eden, the nearest he comes to the mention of the tempter (a 'character' indisputably prominent in the original account) is a vague remark about a 'serpentine subtlety'.[1]

The clause 'even if he is a fact', to some extent, softens the blow, but it is not a decisive enough statement to suggest a theory about the origin of evil in which an external demonic power operates as a positive agent of corruption in the world of men. Here we are given a theological attitude which, at first, seems strangely at odds with the picture of evil that is presented in, for example, the novels War in Heaven and All Hallows Eve, or the play Terror of Light. A note of warning is necessary at this point. It is easy to exaggerate the dualism in these works and to misunderstand the use to which Williams is putting the idea of conflict between cosmic powers of good and evil. The centre of gravity is not the conflict itself (even in War in Heaven) but the actions and choices of human beings caught up in the conflict. It is clear what Williams intended. Unfortunately, he frequently failed to realise his intentions, and the descriptions of conflict are more vividly present to the reader's imagination for the simple reason that, in his early novels at least, he was incapable of creating characters convincing enough to involve the reader in their actions and

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1 'A serpentine subtlety overwhelmed that statement with a grander promise'. p.20.

interior decisions. It must also be admitted that Williams from time to time indulged a streak of artistic vulgarity and deliberately heightened the dualism for the crude purpose of increasing the purely narrative excitement. We are reminded of Anne Ridler's comment that Williams derived 'intense literary enjoyment' from the struggle between the powers of good and evil 'romantically expressed'. Perhaps his attitude to evil in these works should not be taken seriously but should be accepted at the level of fairy-tale fantasy only. Unfortunately, so simple and convenient a solution is prevented by certain disquieting remarks that appear at the end of the book Witchcraft (published in 1941). After investigating some of the occult beliefs and practices of Western Europe Williams himself raises the question of the origin and power of evil and points to a possible inconsistency in his own theodicy.[1]

What must be asserted, however, is that he made every effort to be consistent in all his specifically theological essays. Throughout He Came Down from Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins any suggestion that 'the struggle between good and evil is immemorial and from eternity'[2] is regarded as utterly unacceptable in a Christian theology, and the battle against 'principalities and powers; against the hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' is dismissed with a cursoriness that is inescapably at variance with the theodicy of the whole of the New

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1 This problem will be examined further in the section dealing directly with Witchcraft.

2 The phrase is taken from a book by Canon Roger Lloyd, The Mastery of Evil (1941), p.36.

Testament.[1]

This thoroughgoing repudiation of all forms of dualism (however moderate) has, I believe, two serious consequences in Williams's work: one is literary, the other, theological. The first need not detain us, but it cannot go entirely unremarked. His theodicy almost certainly explains some of the idiosyncratic aspects of his reading of Paradise Lost. In the essay for The London Mercury of July, 1937, entitled The New Milton (a preparatory study for his introduction to the World's Classics edition of 1940) he argues for an element of comedy in the portrayal of the figure of Satan: 'Milton imagined Satan as silly', and '... it becomes clear that Satan is merely wrong: the facts laugh at him. The facts are that he never came anywhere near shaking the throne.'[2] It may indeed be true, in the theological perspective, that Satan's power is mocked by God's omnipotence and that Milton, personally, believed this. We are however, dealing, not with the brute facts of theological truth, nor with Milton's personal faith, but with an inescapably ambivalent, and possibly vacillating, translation of these facts in an epic-dramatic poem. The picture of the rebel archangel simply does not have the clear outlines that Williams would have us see.

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This statement is not intended to suggest that the writers of the New Testament postulated a kind of dualism in which the forces of good (God) were seen to be in eternal opposition to those of evil (the devil and his angels), but that they naturally assumed the existence of cosmic forces of evil, saw the created order as yet in bondage to them, and spoke of the work of Christ as a victory achieved by God.
Cf. Mk. 1.34,39; 3.22ff.; Gal. 1.4; Col. 2.15; 1Cor. 15.24; Rom. 8.35; 1John 3.8 & 5.19; John. 12.31 & 16.8.

2
The Image of the City, pp.19 and 23.

Doubtless light has been thrown on a neglected dimension of Milton's work by Williams's interpretation, but it is by no means the only dimension, and, as the literary controversy of the last two hundred years has shown, even if Milton intended this reading to be definitive (as Williams argues) he can hardly be said to have achieved his object.

The second consequence is theological; in essence simply the reverse side of the coin of the literary consequence, though more relevant to the study in hand. The doubt cast on the existence of the devil and the reality of demonic power defines the lines along which Williams was to interpret one of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian Faith - the Atonement.

Although the Church has never seen fit to advance a dogmatic definition of the precise way in which God and the world are reconciled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it can be seen that certain approaches to the question have governed the thinking of writers and teachers since the first century. Among the most prominent of the interpretations is the one which revolves around the idea of Victory. Gustav Aulen, in his critical survey of the history of the doctrine, Christus Victor, argues persuasively for the centrality of the idea, not only in the theology of the New Testament but also in the patristic expositions of both Eastern and Western Christendom, and claims for the approach the status of a 'classic idea'.

> ... it may be definitely laid down that it dominates the whole of Greek patristic theology from Irenaeus to John of Damascus ....
>
> ... the classic idea of the Atonement is the dominant view of the

> Western as of the Eastern fathers. We find it in Ambrose, pseudo-Ambrose, Augustine, Leo the Great, Caesarius of Arles, Faustus of Rhegium, and Gregory the Great.[1]

The pervasiveness and ubiquity of the idea is undeniable. It has embedded itself not only in the theology, but in the liturgy, the devotion, and the art of the Church in the West since the patristic period. Yet it is an idea that Williams resolutely excludes from his own approach to the doctrine. In this area it might be argued that his attitude is only a part of the general tendency of the Church in the West since the seventeenth century which has undervalued the importance of the, so-called, Christus Victor theory. Aulen provides several reasons for the decline in popularity of this way of coming to terms with the redemptive work of Christ. But only one is, in any way, applicable to Williams, and, even here, there are sharp contrasts between his theological outlook and that of the men Aulen is concerned with.

> There is also another and deeper reason. Dualism was not popular with the Liberal Protestant theology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; but the classic idea of the Atonement is dualistic and dramatic: it depicts the drama of the Atonement against a dualistic background. If Dualism is eliminated, it is impossible to go on thinking of the existence of powers hostile to God, and the basis of the classic view has been dissolved away. Now, the leading theology from the time of the Enlightenment to the nineteenth century lay under the influence of an idealistic metaphysic, and was definitely monistic and evolutionary. It had no place for the dualistic element in Christianity; ....[2]

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1 p.53 and p.55 respectively. (Trans. of A.G. Hebert, 1931).

2 Ibid., p.27.

Williams, like the Liberal Protestants, is an out and out monist. He will not admit to his system the faintest possibility of a world in the power of any agency other than God. In the seventh chapter of He Came Down from Heaven he propounds this belief with startling clarity and sublime confidence.

> There is no split second of the unutterable horror and misery of the world that he did not foresee (to use the uselessness of that language) when he created; no torment of children, no obstinacy of social wickedness, no starvation of the innocent, no prolonged and deliberate cruelty, which he did not know .... The First Cause cannot escape being the First Cause .... The pious have been - as they always are - too anxious to excuse him; the prophet was wiser: 'I form the light and create the darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.' (p.99)

This uncompromising rejection of dualism is developed further in the later essay, The Cross, which tackles the problem of the saving work of Christ from another angle, and we shall see there that Williams is prepared to drive his argument to its logical conclusion: if there is evil in the world then, somehow, God must be held responsible for it. His apprehension of the Atonement is fixed, not on the idea of a victory over sin and death, but on the way in which God's love and His justice can be reconciled by the death of His Son.

The very language of the passage just quoted is sufficient evidence of the profound difference between the theology of Williams and that of Liberal Protestantism which, in its repudiation of dualism, it resembles. Williams never loses sight of the misery and darkness of human experience and never disclaims its reality. It is indisputably there and constitutes one of the central problems for Christian theology. His is neither an idealist metaphysic nor a confident evolutionary theory.

The refusal of dualism has its roots in his reading of the Genesis story - a reading which is undeniably eccentric (in the strict sense of that word) in the relation it bears to the doctrine of the Fall as it has developed in the nineteen hundred years of Christian theology.

C.S. Lewis, in his book The Problem of Pain, rightly points to the curiously one-sided treatment which the Genesis account has received at the hands of the doctors of the Church.

> The story in Genesis is a story (full of the deepest suggestion) about a magic apple of knowledge; but in the developed doctrine the inherent magic of the apple has quite dropped out of sight, and the story is simply one of disobedience. I have the deepest respect even for Pagan myths, still more for myths in Holy Scripture. I therefore do not doubt that the version which emphasises the magic apple, and brings together the trees of life and knowledge, contains a deeper and subtler truth than the version which makes the apple simply and solely a pledge of obedience. But I assume that the Holy Spirit would not have allowed the latter to grow up in the Church and win the assent of great doctors unless it also was true and useful as far as it went.[1]

Williams's critique is an example of the way in which the artistic imagination sometimes illuminates areas that have been overlooked by the theological mind. His is an attempt to grapple with the 'deeper and subtler truth' that Lewis speaks of. The moral aspect of the story - the freely-chosen disobedience to a specific command - is not ignored entirely, but the interpretation revolves around the question of knowledge (symbolised by the tree), and his discussion sets aside the mere act of disobedience in favour of a consideration of the form and

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1 The Problem of Pain, Ch.V (Fontana Books), pp.59-60.

structure of the act itself.

The heading of the second chapter of He Came Down from Heaven establishes the key of his approach, and the substance of his reading is contained in the following sentences from the chapter:

> They [the Adam] knew good: they wished to know good and evil. Since there was not - since there never has been and never will be - anything but the good to know, they knew good as antagonism. All difference consists in the mode of knowledge.[1]

Williams sees it as a matter of vital importance that we should not overlook the 'details' of the Genesis story. We are not merely to observe the Adam eating fruit that is forbidden, but to take note of the kind of tree from which it is plucked. The myth is a story about knowledge and ways of knowing, and his way of paraphrasing and commenting on the simple Biblical statement 'their eyes were opened' (Genesis, Ch.III, v.7) is to assert that 'All difference consists in the mode of knowledge'. The structure and forms of the world, man and his total environment, i.e. the 'facts' of creation, remain unchanged, but the Adam's understanding of those 'facts', himself and his environment, undergoes a radical reversal. His knowledge of the world is altered and his being experiences a violent outrage. The world remains good; it remains itself, but man no longer has the capacity for recognising it as such, because he has desired to know something else; he has willingly desired to know it as it is not. This is the meaning behind Williams's paradoxical assertion that the Adam wanted to know the good 'as evil'.[2]

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[1] p.21.

[2] He Came Down from Heaven, p.22.
Cf. W.H. Auden's succinct summary of the same position
'Sin fractures the Vision, not the Fact ....'
For the Time Being, Third Section, Semi-Chorus.

The 'opening' of man's eyes involves, not an increase in knowledge - there can be no more facts to know in Eden, which is why Williams refers to the story as a tale of impossibility - but knowledge in another mode: knowledge of the complete absence of good. The Eden story is, then, a tragic description of destruction through illusion for it depicts the attempt to know what cannot be known; what is desired does not exist.[1]

This definition of evil in entirely negative terms may seem, at first sight, to be a far cry from the crude and melodramatic portrayals in earlier works like the poems The Other Side of the Way and A Dream from the volume Windows of Night. But it can be seen that Williams was steadily working towards this concept. For example, something of the idea of both loss and absurdity is conveyed in the poem The Purchase from the same volume, when the narrowness and squalor of sin and hell are imagined.

> And the great Republic closes to one dull lane,
> One ugly door, and towards that door I go,[2]

And five years later in the novel War in Heaven, the idea of the negation of the good and a draining away of the human personality into nothingness is powerfully suggested by the images of cold and desolation in the scene in which Gregory Persimmons surrenders himself to some kind of demonic possession.[3] A more specifically theological adumbration of

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1 Cf. W.H. Auden. Evil is not an existence but a state of disharmony between existences. Pure evil would be pure passivity, a denial by an existence of any relation with any other existence .... From New Year Letter (Footnote to 1.563), a poem which owes, as Auden himself acknowledges, much to the ideas of Williams.

2 p.110.

3 pp.127-128.

the concept occurs in Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind which appeared still later, in 1933.

> Heaven and hell define each other, but heaven can exist without hell and hell cannot exist without heaven since heaven's free love is its hell.

This last quotation is a highly significant one, for, just as Keats was preoccupied with the thought of death, so Williams constantly returns to the idea of the possibility of hell. It can hardly be doubted that this is partly explained by his own intense awareness of the universal experience of loss and futility, but his concern, like Keats's, is not a morbid one. Close attention to his work shows that just as, theologically, he believed hell to be 'dependent on', and defined by, heaven (and not vice versa) so his own conception of hell grows out of a clear and deep realisation of the possibility of beatitude - the life of heaven. The experience of joy and glory is always prior (perhaps not chronologically, but certainly metaphysically) to the endurance of desolation and horror. And this sense of proportion is scrupulously maintained in all his works. In the novel Many Dimensions, for instance, Williams illustrates the position in a wry and slightly whimsical way.

> ... for in matters of pleasure she [Chloe Burnett] had a high sense of duty, and not to cause gaiety appeared to her as a failure in morals.[1]

The constant recurrence of the theme of hell and the possibility of damnation is evidence of the seriousness with which Williams viewed the fallen condition of man.

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1 Many Dimensions, p.50.

I have already remarked on the 'eccentricity' of Williams's reconstruction of the Eden story. To what extent can it be said that his whole theodicy is similarly eccentric? First, it must be made clear that he stands firmly within the tradition of the Western Church on the problem of evil - even in those areas of belief where he gives the appearance of being most unconventional. (His attitude to the existence of the devil is a case in point: the turning away from the accepted pattern of Western thinking and belief does not involve a turning towards any of the Eastern formulations.) In, what has become, one of the classical studies of the growth and development of the Fall doctrine The Ideas of the Fall and Original Sin the author, N.P. Williams, shows that it was a characteristic of patristic theology in the East to place the accent on a notion of privatio in the approach to the question of Original Sin. The Fall is most commonly seen as a result of an inherent weakness and vulnerability of the original childlike Adamic nature. Augustine's concept of man living in a state of Original Righteousness, endowed with singular gifts of grace and beauty,[1] is not part of this picture of paradisal existence. This interpretation

> ... whilst preserving the essential outlines of the Pauline teaching, wears a humane, reasonable, and curiously modern complexion ... it gives us a picture of primitive man as frail, imperfect, and child-like - a picture which is on the whole unaffected

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In the Western Church it seems that Ambrose was the first to teach the doctrine of 'Original Righteousness' in anything like a developed sense. But it was Augustine who brought the concept to its fullness with theories about the unassailable health and youth of the Adam, their brilliant mental powers and unsurpassed beauty.
Cf. N.P. Williams, The Ideas of the Fall and Original Sin, Lectures IV and V, Esp. pp.300 ff. & 360 ff.

> by the Rabbinical figment of Adam's 'Original Righteousness', ...It exaggerates neither the height from which, nor the depth to which, the first men are alleged to have fallen. It finds in the inherited disorder of our nature rather a ~~weakness~~ a weakness to be pitied rather than an offence to be condemned ....[1]

Williams's apprehension of the doctrine of Original Sin stands in marked contrast to this way of approaching the Fall. In addition to his preoccupation with the possibility of hell and damnation (which has already been remarked), this chapter alone, The Myth of the Alteration of Knowledge, contains numerous indications of his explicitly Latin bias. Far from seeing the Adam's action as an inevitable result of primitive immaturity or child-like frailty, or the world 'of mingled good and evil' as a kind of school of perfection, Williams views the act of disobedience as a deliberate attempt at defying the Creator's purpose and bringing into being a state of affairs in which the world becomes a place of conflict and horror for the entire human race.

> A certain knowledge was, by its nature, confined to divine beings. Its communication to man would be, by its nature, disastrous to man. (p.19)

> The full result of their determination is now exhibited .... Sorrow and conception; the evil of the ground; the sorrow of life; the hardship of toil; all things in antagonism and schism; love a distress and labour a grief; .... (p.22)

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1 Williams, pp.199-200. In the more recent study by John Hick, Evil and the God of Love the same point is made. Hick takes the exposition of Irenaeus as representative of the Eastern approach to the problem.

> 'Instead of the doctrine that man was created finitely perfect and then incomprehensibly destroyed his own perfection and plunged into sin and misery, Irenaeus suggests that man was created as an imperfect, immature creature who was to undergo moral development and growth and finally be brought to the perfection intended for him by his Maker .... Irenaeus sees our world of mingled good and evil as a divinely appointed environment for man's development towards the perfection that represents the fulfilment of God's good purpose for him.

Part. III, Section 4, pp.220-221.

> Human relationship has become to man a source of anger and hate, and the hatred in its turn brings more desolation. (p.23)

It is Augustine's extensive formulations of the doctrine of Original Sin that have dominated the thinking of the Church in the West,[1] and Williams stands in this tradition, but he refuses much that is characteristic of developed Augustinianism. We have already noticed his complete rejection of the Augustinian reconstruction of the Eden story. Williams also treats the idea of supernatural perfection in the doctrine of Original Righteousness with a certain degree of scepticism.[2] And he says nothing about the notion of inherited guilt - though he makes it plain both in this essay and in later works that he sees the whole of humanity, somehow (specifically not by seminal presence in the loins of a historical person, Adam) involved in the Fall.[3] Nor does he give

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N.P. Williams, 'It was shown in our last lecture that the sombre and pessimistic version of the Fall-theory ... which received its chief development in the stern and fanatical atmosphere of the North African Church, and which was wrought into a rounded and coherent, and classical doctrine by the genius of St. Augustine, though victorious all along the line in the field of Western Christendom, yet exercised only a superficial influence on the mind of the Christian East.' (Beginning of lecture VI, p.395).

2
There is nothing about intellectual power; in fact, so far as their activities in Genesis are concerned, the intelligence of the Adam is limited to preserving their lives by obtaining food, by a capacity for agriculture, and by a clear moral sense, though behind these things lies the final incantation of the creation: 'Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness', and the decision upon that, as upon the earliest rift of light: 'behold, it was very good'. (p.19)

3
In the third chapter of the later essay he says in a footnote. 'I do not mean to involve a prenatal existence.' Although there is no mention of guilt here, in <u>The Descent of the Dove</u> Williams does remark of our identity with the Adam, '... more, we sinned in him and his guilt is in us ....' (p.69)

credence to the idea of the infinite malice of the first sin; nor to the virtual abolition of freedom that is the logical conclusion of Augustine's position. But on the actual nature of evil, Williams relies heavily on those philosophical definitions of Augustine that have become the substance of the Catholic theology of evil. However pessimistic Augustine's view of the depths to which man has fallen, his exposition of the real nature of evil never departed from the fundamental conception that is an absence of what is good: a loss and not an acquisition. Williams quotes from the seventh chapter of the Confessions, and in the third and fourth chapters of the Enchiridion Augustine elaborates the statement made in the earlier book.

> Evil, then is an accident, i.e. a privation of that good which is called health. Thus, whatever defects there are in a soul are privations of a natural good. This leads us to a surprising conclusion: that, since every being, in so far as it is a being, is good, if we then say that a defective is bad, it would seem to mean that what is evil is good, that only what is good is ever evil and that there is no evil apart from something good. This is because every actual entity is good (omnis natura bonum est.) Nothing evil exists in itself, but only as an evil accident of some actual entity.[1]

These definitions have tended to dominate the thinking of the Catholic Church ever since they were first made.[2] Thomas Aquinas, for example, does little more than amplify them in his own theodicy, giving more

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1 Enchiridion, Chs. III and IV respectively. Trans. by A.C. Outler in the Library of Christian Classics series. Vol. VII, pp.343 and 344 respectively.

2 In Evil and the God of Love John Hick's examination of the philosophical tendencies in Catholic theodicy shows the dominating influence of Augustine's propositions. (Ch. III, IV & V).

precise outline to the shape that is provided by Augustine,[1] As a result, it is impossible to say exactly where Williams derived his own apprehension from - in essence his stance here is the traditional position of the Western Church. But he is concerned to quote Augustine on this very matter in his own text, and it is reasonable to suppose that he allowed the thought and even the terminology of the fifth century teacher to determine the shape of his own conception.

Augustine is one of the two philosophers that Williams actually makes reference to in this section of the book. The other is Thomas Aquinas, and it is on the formulations of the Summa Theologica that he draws in his examination of the acute philosophical problem raised by postulating on the one hand that the story of the Fall is a story about knowledge, and on the other, by maintaining that there could be no more 'facts' for the Adam to know. If evil is the absence of good, essentially non-existent, and in itself unknowable, how can it be possible for man to have knowledge and, what is more puzzling, experience, of something which, by definition, has no real being? What kind of meaning lies behind the promise of the serpent 'Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.'? Williams tries to solve the problem by taking over Aquinas's notion of the distinction between the knowledge which is proper to God and that which belongs to man. The knowledge possessed by God

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Summa Theologica. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. (London, 1912), Pt. I, Q.xlix, Art. I, 'For evil is the absence of the good, which is natural and due to a thing' and 'Hence it is true that evil in no way has any but an accidental cause; and thus good is the cause of evil.' Cf. also Q.xlviii.

apprehends possibility as well as actuality, and Williams refers to the Fifteenth Question of the Summa Theologica where the Medieval theologian draws the distinction between knowledge 'by vision' and knowledge by 'simple intelligence'. It is possible, according to Aquinas, for God to know absence or privation without causing it (bringing it into being).[1] It is not possible for man, that is the condition of creation. The fundamental premise of Aquinas's Treatise on Creation is that all beings apart from God 'are not their own being, but are beings by participation'. And in the Third Article of the Forty-fifth Question the premise is elaborated in the following way:

> But in God relation to the creature is not a real relation, but a relation of reason; whereas the relation of the creature to God is a real relation.[2]

The promise to the Adam that they would be 'as gods' was, quite simply, a lie. Man's being and God's are radically different and their modes of knowledge differ accordingly. It is impossible for man to possess sheerly 'intellectual' knowledge, i.e. knowledge by 'simple intelligence'. His knowledge is 'existential' (his is a 'real' relation); for him, to know is, inescapably, to experience. So to know the absence of good is to undergo the deprivation of good at the core of his being. And as there is only the good to be known - evil having no existence in itself - man undergoes the experience of discovering the good under another guise.

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1 Summa Theologica, Pt. I, Q.xiv, Articles IX and X.

2 Ibid., Pt. I, Q.xlv, Art. III.

The features of creation change under his gaze and existence itself becomes known as antagonism. 'All difference consists in the mode of knowledge'. This statement contains the irreducible essence of Williams's apprehension of the doctrine of Original Sin. The attention is focussed on knowledge and it is this focus which gives his theodicy its distinctive shape; a focus that follows logically upon his attempt at consistent monism. This difference in knowledge is the 'Troilus experience'; the unbearable schism <u>within</u> Reason; the world 'horribly doubled'; the experience of 'good as evil'. In consequence we are called upon to face the reality of hell - the ultimate stage of perverted knowledge, not the abode of Satan. It only exists because of heaven. It is the 'place' where the free love of heaven is known as pain and horror because it cannot be seen and recognised for what it is.

It is possibly a weakness of Williams's 'scheme' that there is no attempt at coming to grips directly with the problem of 'Nature red in tooth and claw', i.e. with the question of the possibility of evil existing at those levels in the created order which are lower than man's self-conscious life. His eye is fixed firmly, almost exclusively, upon the human condition and no consideration is given to the place of the disruptive forces of earthquake, flood, famine, disease in God's plan for the universe. Here an interesting parallel with his poetry can be drawn. Williams's verse, despite its conscious imitation of many nineteenth century techniques, exists in a world of feeling and seeing utterly removed from the English Romantic tradition. He is a poet of the city, and his rare attempts at producing poems which extol the beauty

and terror of man's natural environment are embarrassingly unsuccessful.[1] His interest is always centred on human beings - their loves, hatreds, fears, sufferings. Similarly, in his theology he begins and ends with the problem of man's existence in relation to God. In the first account of creation in Genesis (the later source) man is created last as the crown and glory of the universe. In the second account (the earlier source) the concern of the 'author' is slightly different. There is less interest in the way the world was made and more in the nature and quality of human life. This account contains the traditional story of the Fall, and it is this account that Williams takes as his starting-point. But he drives his concern in humanity beyond the point that is made by the myth. Man stands at the very centre of creation and the secret of the doctrine of creation can only be found in the discovery of the secret of human life - the doctrine of man. Once discover that and all else will follow. Man is not merely to be regarded as the crown and glory of creation, he is its purpose and its explanation. So, he seems to argue, what happens to man automatically happens to the rest of the created order. The flaws and distortions in the pattern of the universe can only be explained by reference to what has taken place in the depths of man's nature.

As we shall see later, this leads Williams on to adopt a decidedly

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1 Cf. Hadfield, p.203.

> As for Nature, no one can have been more unconscious of the whole business. Even now he could not recognize sweet peas in a bowl. He was notoriously bored with flowers in poetry.

unconventional position on the Incarnation. If the secret of creation is contained within man, the secret of man is contained in Christ - God in man and man in God. In The Forgiveness of Sins he postulates that the Incarnation is to be regarded as metaphysically prior to the creation, and confidently announces, in the third chapter, that 'the Incarnation did not involve the Creation'. But before propounding the elements of this belief he turns to examine the consequences of the Fall in the history of the Jewish people.

The pain and horror of an existence known as conflict and schism is, for Williams, most movingly and realistically expressed in the bitter utterances of the book Ecclesiastes.

> This is the conclusion of the knowledge of good and evil. Life, in that first great myth of origin, was given as good, and men thought it would be fine and godlike to enjoy it also as evil. This is the result - life is no good and death is no good, and the most fortunate are those who have not been.[1]

He recognises that this pessimism is not the dominant, nor even the characteristic note of the writings of the Old Testament. Alongside its realistic acknowledgement of wickedness and suffering, the Old Testament contains a message of hope and joy. In the testimonies of the prophets the redeemed and restored life was a life lived in the forgiving love of Yahweh, and entry into that life was gained only by the gate of repentance. Williams fastens on to the idea of forgiveness and points out that the central image in the Old Testament idea of

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1 He Came Down from Heaven, p.44.

forgiveness is the image of eradication: either a 'blotting-out' of sin or else a treating of the sinner as though his sin had never been. This conception presents a thorny problem: if a thing has been how is it possible to say it has not been? Forgiveness as an act of forgetfulness on the part of God is, quite simply, unsatisfactory. Williams again emphasises the brute facts of creation. If the High and Holy One is prepared to forget what has been is he not 'only finding felicity by losing fact'.[1] Real pardon must be an action or attitude which takes facts into consideration and turns them to a new purpose. As man has chosen to know good as evil there is the inescapable fact of evil, and if the Fall is to be 'reversed', the fact itself must still somehow be known, though known in its opposite mode by another means. For this reason Christianity is seen to be utterly distinct from every other religion - all things are to be known. The consequences of the Fall cannot be undone, they can only be changed. Evil must be known as good. Death must be known as life. Sin must be transfigured. And in the fourth chapter 'The Precursor and the Incarnation' Williams introduces words from Julian of Norwich and Augustine to support his interpretation.

> All is most well; evil is 'pardoned' - it is known after another manner; in an interchange of love, therefore as a means of the good. <u>O felix culpa</u> - pardon is no longer an oblivion but an increased knowledge, a knowledge of all things in a perfection of joy.[2]

Yet how is this transfiguration to take place? If the facts are

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1 p.39.

2 p.59.

inescapable it must be accomplished from within the life of man, and yet it cannot be done by man, for his being is in conflict, his reason is in schism and his life is one of impotence. The answer is the paradox of the Incarnation - God as man, the supreme act of substitution and exchange.

In a book review for the periodical Time and Tide entitled 'Anthropotokos' and published in the same year as He Came Down from Heaven, Williams, in the course of a discussion on the meaning of the notion of the 'city', summarises his position on the Incarnation stressing the importance - more, the centrality of the idea of exchange.

> What is the fundamental fact of men in their natural lives? The necessity of exchange. What is the highest level of Christian dogma? Exchange between men and God, by virtue of the union of Man and God in the Single Person, who is, by virtue again of that Manhood, Itself the City, the foundation and the enclosure .... This office of substitution did not need Christendom to exhibit it .... Christendom declared something more; it declared that this principle of substitution was at the root of the supernatural, of universal life, as well as of natural.[1]

Exchange is defined as part of the nature of God. It is seen as the root principle of all existence, and the perfect pattern of exchange between man and God is seen in the co-inherence of Divine nature and human nature in Jesus Christ. Consequently, because man and God live together i.e. exchange lives in the single person of the Incarnate Lord, men are given the power of knowing their own existence as God knows it. The transformation of the facts is accomplished by God in man. We are

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1 The Image of the City, pp.112-113.

reminded of the importance Williams attached to the clause from the Athanasian creed, 'One not by conversion of the Godhead into Flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God.' The facts of creation are 'changed' by the Creator's own entry into them. In His enduring of the schism by the act of substitution, evil is known, by those for whom the substitution is made, as an occasion for good - the greatest of all such occasions. The motive power behind this principle of exchange is love. It is love which gives men the strength to make individual, personal acts of substitution and vicarious suffering, and it is in the Incarnation that the love of God is most clearly manifest. Once again, 'natural' life, the life lived by ordinary men and women, can be read as an image of 'supernatural' life, the life of God. This is Williams's way of seeing the Atonement; not as a victory over the forces of evil or over sin and death, but as an operation of substitutionary love.

But he did not subscribe to the traditional view that the Incarnation was necessitated by the schism within man's being; and he was drawn, first by his intense preoccupation with the purely human aspect of creation, and, secondly, by this notion of the centrality of the principle of exchange, in the direction of that Incarnational theology commonly associated with Duns Scotus and the Franciscans of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. That is, that the idea of the Incarnation was due to the primal and absolute purpose of love foreshadowed in Creation, apart from sin which was contingent. This particular approach to

the doctrine may be regarded as unconventional, but it is not forbidden to Christian belief and is by no means restricted to Duns Scotus and the Franciscans. In his essay, The Gospel of Creation, the nineteenth century scholar, B.F. Westcott, traces the history of the interpretation from its appearance in the work of Rupert of Deutz in the first part of the twelfth century through its various guises in the works of Alexander of Hales (c. 1170 - 1245), Albert the Great (c.1200 - 1280), Bonaventura (1221 - 1274) and Duns Scotus (1264 - 1308) up to the rather more tentative approaches made by Socinus (1539 - 1604) and Calvin (1509 - 1564). Even Thomas Aquinas is prepared to admit that it is possible to maintain that the Incarnation was ordained from Eternity and, whether the Fall had occurred or not, must have taken place, but is unwilling, himself, to argue that such a position is the most 'suitable' in the light of what is to be apprehended in Scripture.

> ... since everywhere in the Sacred Scripture the sin of the first man is assigned as the reason of the Incarnation, it is more in accordance with this to say that the work of the Incarnation was ordained by God as a remedy for sin; so that, had sin not existed, the Incarnation would not have been. Although the power of God is not limited to this; - even had not sin existed, God could have become incarnate.
>
> (Summa Theologica, Pt.III, Q.i, Art.III)

The Gospel of Creation is Westcott's own apologia for the validity and appropriateness of such view of God's purposes in creation

> The belief that the Incarnation was in essence independent of the Fall has been held by men of the most different schools, in different ways and on different grounds. All however in the main agree in this, that they find in the belief a crowning promise of the unity of the Divine Order; a fulfilment, a consummation, of the original purpose of creation; a more

> complete and harmonious view of the relation of finite being to God than can be gained otherwise.[1]

The theory crops up in a number of places, and in a number of ways, in Williams's writings. In his history of the Church, The Descent of the Dove, it is mentioned as a bare historical fact. In his review of two books by Denis Saurat (Regeneration and The Christ at Chartres) for Time and Tide (2 November, 1940) however, as also in the essay, 'Natural Goodness', published in Theology (October, 1941), he speaks of it as a permissible belief for Christians and clearly leans towards the view himself. Anne Ridler states categorically that he did hold to the theory, an assertion which, as has already been noted, is borne out in the sequel to He Came Down from Heaven, the extended essay The Forgiveness of Sins. At the beginning of the third chapter of this later work he claims that 'the beginning of all this specific creation (the universe) was the Will of God to Incarnate'.[2] He acknowledges in a footnote to this sentence that he is following an 'arrangement of doctrine' which might be regarded as unusual but which he believes to be within the bounds of orthodoxy. He follows up the sentence however with a paragraph in which a far more unusual position is advanced.

> It is clear that this Incarnation, like all his other acts, might have been done to himself alone. It was certainly not necessary for him to create man in order that he might himself become man. The Incarnation did not involve the Creation. But it was within his nature to will to create joy, and he willed to create joy in this manner also.[3]

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1 The Epistles of St. John. 'The Gospel of Creation' London, 1886, pp.317-318.

2 p.119.

3 Ibid.

Here Williams is more daring and, perhaps, more foolhardy; more imaginative and less intollectually secure, than Westcott or any of the scholars cited by him in his essay The Gospel of Creation. To pastulate that the Incarnation had always been intended by God as the goal and consummation of His creative activity is one thing; to suggest its hypothetical independence from creation is quite another. It is possible to draw a distinction between, on the one hand the will to incarnate and the idea of Incarnation, and on the other the circumstances of the act, but the reference of the scholars to circumstances is specifically to man's fallen condition.

> ... it can be fairly maintained that we are led by Holy Scripture to regard the circumstances of the Incarnation as separable from the idea of the Incarnation, and to hold that the circumstances of the Incarnation were due to sin, while the idea of the Incarnation was due to the primal and absolute purpose of love foreshadowed in Creation, apart from which sin was contingent.[1]

It is nowhere suggested that creation itself is a circumstance, a stage-setting made necessary by the drama of the flesh-taking, which is precisely Williams's suggestion in this particular passage. Whereas Westcott sees creation as an activity of God which culminates in the union of Himself and man in Christ, Williams verges on making Incarnation a necessity of God's being and (quite unambiguously in the later essay 'Natural Goodness') postulates creation as a by-product of the God's primary intention, the union of Divinity with matter. If it were possible to establish an order of precedence in the activity of the

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1 The Epistles of St. John, p.233.

Uncreated, Incarnation would take precedence over creation.

Perhaps the most interesting reference to this theory occurs, not in a theological work, but in the literary essay, Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind. The subject under discussion is Milton, and speaking of the peculiar difficulties of portraying Omnipotence and Omniscience in a work of art Williams says, in a rather impudent way,

> ... if Christianity were not true, it would have been necessary, for the sake of letters to invent it. It is the only safe means by which poetry can compose the heavens, without leaving earth entirely out of the picture. The Incarnation, had it not been necessary to man's redemption, would have been necessary to his art; the rituals of the Church have omitted that important fact from their paeans.[1]

The Incarnation is the means by which heaven and earth are united; the paradoxical point at which God and man are joined, and the Absolute presents itself in mutable and intimately apprehensible terms. There would be no means of portraying it had things been otherwise. The validity of this view at the level of aesthetics is open to question; the argument is, essentially, specious, but that is not the point at issue here. What is worthy of notice is the unity of Williams's sensibility: the attempt he made in his work - whatever its genre - to weld into a coherent whole every facet of his belief and experience.

Once the centrality of the principle of exchange is recognised it becomes easier to understand why Williams leaned in the direction of the 'Scotist' view of the Incarnation. All joy is grounded in the operation

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1 Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind, p.119.

of exchange. That is simply a definition for Williams; an irreducible fact; an assumption basic to his whole theology. God by His nature wills joy. The highest and the deepest joy for men must inevitably lie in the exchange between their Creator and themselves. The nodal point and the source of all joy therefore is the Word made flesh. Williams is developing the medieval interpretation of the doctrine by adding a new dimension to it. Albert the Great, Bonaventura, Duns Scotus all speak of the exaltation of the creature by its union with the Creator in the Incarnate Lord. These ideas of exaltation and glory are surely what Williams intends by the concept of joy. But Williams's word is more intensely human, more closely linked with the day-to-day experiences of personal love and beauty. The new dimension is that of exchange. This notion suggests a more immediate union between God and the creature than seems to have been imagined by many of the scholars who preceded him, and the definition is, so to speak, more dynamic than static. The referential framework is one of personal relationships rather than one of metaphysical categories of being. God and man exchange lives in that pattern of co-inherence which is the historical Jesus. Here in the Incarnation is the utmost joy; a joy ordained from Eternity. The Fall could neither cause nor prevent it. The 'schism in reason' simply became the circumstance of its occurrence. Because of the disobedience of the Adam the exchange was to be known, and the joy experienced, after a different manner.

I have already drawn attention to the peculiar difficulties of He Came Down from Heaven; difficulties caused, to a large extent, by

matters of style and sensibility. I have also stressed the importance of responding to those aspects of the work if a proper understanding of Williams is to be gained. So before proceeding with the examination of the book, it might be useful to take a closer look at the structure of the sensibility which makes itself known through the idiosyncratic prose. First, a negative approach by comparison with a more famous contemporary, Graham Greene. In his moving and perceptive autobiographical account of a journey through Mexico entitled The Lawless Roads Greene openly displays the shape of his own religious attitudes in the Prologue.

> And so faith came to one - shapelessly, without dogma, a presence above a croquet lawn, something associated with violence, cruelty, evil across the way. One began to believe in heaven because one believed in hell, but for a long while it was only hell one could picture with a certain intimacy[1]

Such an apprehension of God and man, thoroughly understandable in, and perhaps more attuned to, life in the twentieth century is the exact opposite of Williams's. There are two important points of contrast. First his belief about heaven and hell is the reverse of Greene's. His awareness of the horror and pain of life is no less direct than Greene's but, as he makes clear time after time, hell only exists because men have refused the knowledge of heaven. Secondly faith comes to Williams not as a dim awareness, a vague feeling, 'shapelessly, without dogma', but as an experience of clear brilliance, a 'thing' defined and exact.

Williams's sensibility is probably more closely akin to that of

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1 The Lawless Roads (London, 1939), p.11.

Dante than to that of any other writer (poet, saint, scholar) in the history of the world. In two of its most important aspects his vision of heaven and the life of God relies heavily, almost completely, on the thirteenth century Italian. The constantly recurring images with which he chooses to communicate his apprehension of heavenly glory are the images of human love and mathematical order. Again it is possible to see the germ of statements in He Came Down from Heaven in the earlier works. One of the most revealing comments about the connection between religion and human love is to be found in Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind.

> But what is this heaven? It is a state where the exquisite paradox of human love at its finest is true of the very nature of life itself; where what we know but for a moment or two is the very definition of existence.[1]

The fifth chapter of He Came Down from Heaven, entitled 'The Theology of Romantic Love', develops this assertion. It is a little commentary on two of Dante's works, The New Life and The Banquet, and is a preliminary study for the much more detailed investigation of The Figure of Beatrice. We are, in this chapter, dealing with Williams's doctrine of Creation as well as with his doctrine of man and God, and, consequently we are once again back in the world of images. There is no need to reiterate what has already been said about the function of images, only the need to concentrate on the way in which this particular image, romantic love, is treated here. Nowhere does Williams claim that the experience of

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1 pp.110-111.

romantic love i.e. of 'falling in love' (he is careful to avoid defining the experience in detail) is more significant than any other really deep experience in human life. Nor does he say that the image of the beloved is the only, or the best, way of apprehending the life and glory of God. But he does aver that the experience is the most immediate in its effects and that it is a way which has been perilously ignored by Christian theologians. He repeats this asseveration in his history of the Church The Descent of the Dove.

In his analysis of Dante's attitudes a few points may be noted as having significance. The first is that the vision of love which bestows the Paradisal sense of new life 'cannot continue to exist permanently without faith and labour'.[1] The Beatrician state, as a conscious awareness of real significance, passes. But its authority remains. The vision is granted, the meaning has to be grasped and understood. In this respect the experience of falling in love is exactly the parallel of the common experience of God. Some awareness of the kingdom of heaven darts into a man's life and then quickly fades leaving an emptiness which can only be filled by the effort of the soul in the hard work of consolidation.[2] Williams speaks of the Incarnation in a similar way -

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1 He Came Down from Heaven, p.71.

2 Cf. T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets, 'The Dry Salvages', Pt.V.

.... These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.

the Messiah is received by the bright cloud of Heaven and passes out of the sight of the disciples. They are left with a vision whose meaning they have yet to work out in terms of their own lives.

This leads us directly into the second point: the role the intellect must play in romantic love. 'The intellect is always called upon to do its part'.[1] That intense awareness of reality and purpose which the contemplation of the beloved imparts to the lover has to 'be made sense of', investigated and defined by the brain as the centre of the human being's powers of perception and organisation. The lover is forbidden by the structure of his own humanity to wander perpetually in a haze of emotions. One of Dante's key-phrases is 'the good of the intellect', and in the Divine Comedy the circles of hell are populated with those who have betrayed their intelligence by wilfully refusing to distinguish illusion from reality, truth from falsehood, what is passing from what is eternal. The lovers, Paolo and Francesca, whirling about on the winds of the first circle of hell are most obviously relevant in this context. They are pictured as having indulged emotion at the expense of intellect; they failed to 'make sense of' the romantic vision and exchanged eternal love for the indulgence of a passing passion. In the second chapter 'The Mystery of Pardon and the Paradox of Vanity' Williams comments

> Sin has many forms, but the work of all is the same - the preference of an immediately satisfying experience of things to the believed pattern of the universe; one may even say, the pattern of glory.[2]

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1 He Came Down from Heaven, p.68.

2 p.36.

For the romantic lover, one of the greatest dangers (perhaps the greatest because the easiest) is to imagine that the beloved is sufficient - to confuse the image with the creator of images. Once again the intellectual activity in the love relationship is emphasised.

> The effort after the pattern marks the difference. The superstitions make heaven and earth in the form of the beloved; the theology declares that the beloved is the first preparatory form of heaven and earth.[1]

Williams's maxim which governs his theology of images returns to the mind. 'This also is Thou; neither is this Thou'. For those who imagine the image is self-existent and self-explanatory there can be no redemption. The beloved, though adored in and for herself, is, at the same time, a means only - a means of the revelation of the pattern of the Divine glory.

We come now to the second feature of Williams's conception of heaven: mathematical order. In the opening paragraph of the second chapter he uses the phrase 'the geometry of creation enlarges'.[2] And in the third chapter as he traces the course of God's activity in the history of the Chosen People, the mathematical imagery becomes more and more insistent. The words which occur over and over again are the words 'pattern' and 'glory'. Each successive stage of God's revelation is a further insight into the shape of heavenly existence. For Williams, Yahweh's revelation of Himself and His purposes in history is nothing more nor less than the progressive revelation of a mathematical pattern.

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1 p.70.

2 p.17.

The introduction of mathematical schemes into the critical study of the Old Testament has an audacity equalled only by his determination to make Greek philosophy and Hebrew prophecy bed-fellows.

> 'God always geometrizes' said Plato, and the Hebrew prophets thought no less.[1]

His evidence for this assertion is the strange vision of the prophet Ezekiel: a vision of God's glory in which wheels and eyes form a living geometrical pattern.

> The prophets are sent out from the visible mathematics of the glory to proclaim the moral mathematics of the glory. Morality is either the mathematics of power or it is nothing.[2]

Even the revelation of God to Moses and the subsequent Covenant formed with the wandering tribes of Israelites is discussed in terms of mathematics.

> They [the prophets] are the keepers of the contract; they preserve the relations of the I AM with the people. They preserve also the glory of the I AM. The word glory, to English ears, usually means no more than a kind of mazy bright blur. But the maze should be, though it generally is not, exact, and the brightness should be that of a geometrical pattern.[3]

Essentially every pattern, whatever its individual components, is an identifiable set of relationships. Williams sees that the religious experience is similar in that it involves the perception of an identifiable set of relationships. It is the proper perception of the way in which heaven and earth, God and man, stand in relation to each other. The

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1 p.34.
2 p.35.
3 p.33.

Covenant can be seen as one of the greatest of all patterns for its definition of these relationships is transcended by only one other pattern - the Incarnation.

Williams's doctrine of God could almost be summed up in the phrase 'the mathematics of glory', and he stands at the end of a long line of thinkers - Plato, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Nicholas of Cusa - who have found in the forms and processes of mathematics the most accurate and far-reaching analogies of the life of God. He, like them, finds that a mathematical system has the power to suggest an existence in which there is total harmony and ultimate order. But it is from Dante, and not from the great philosophers that Williams draws his inspiration. The very quality of Dante's thoughts and feelings haunts Williams's writings. Like Dante he binds together the notions of geometrical order and heavenly glory. In, for example, the closing canto of the Divine Comedy there is the momentary and overwhelming sight of the Holy Trinity - Dante's vision of God which combines blazing, piercing brightness and mathematical order.

> That light supreme, within its fathomless
> Clear substance, showed to me three spheres, which bore
> Three hues distinct, and occupied one space;[1]

This is precisely what Williams has in mind when he states, (in the last line of the paragraph that has already been quoted) 'the brightness should be that of a geometrical pattern'. It is in the Divine Comedy too that we find the two definitive images of heaven, romantic love and

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1 The Divine Comedy, Paradise, Canto xxxiii, ll.115-117 (Penguin Transl.)

mathematical design, most closely woven together. And Williams, like Dante, finds in the eternal life of the Holy Trinity both the consummation of all earthly love and the ultimate satisfaction of man's search for perfect order.

> Yet, as a wheel moves smoothly, free from jars,
> My will and my desire were turned by love,
> The love that moves the sun and the other stars.[1]

It is this aspect of his theology: his repeated insistence on the necessity of the 'intellectual' dimension in religious apprehension, and his unshakable conviction that the experience of God and the life of heaven not only could be, but had to be understood as accurate, concrete fact, which separated Williams from the religious sensibility of most Englishmen of his own age. Graham Greene, from within the formal structure of his own quasi-Jansenist Roman Catholicism, affords one example of a typical modern sensibility at variance with that of Williams. Aldous Huxley, an acute observer of English mores in the period between the two World Wars, provides a different, though equally alien, example. In the novel Antic Hay he deliberately portrays, with only a slight element of caricature, the religious attitudes of the average, liberal, twentieth century Englishman. His hero, a half-educated, conventional upper middle-class young man, having taken a post as a schoolmaster, sits pondering the Christian verities in the school chapel during Morning Prayer one Sunday.

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1 Ibid., Canto xxxiii, ll.143-145.

> No, but seriously, Gumbril reminded himself, the problem was very troublesome indeed. God as a sense of warmth about the heart, God as exultation, God as tears in the eyes, God as a rush of power or thought - that was all right. But God as truth, God as 2 + 2 = 4 - that wasn't so clearly all right. Was there any chance of their being the same?[1]

Williams never denied the importance of the emotional and intuitive apprehension of Divinity, but he would never allow that this was sufficient, that any man could remain and rest in a vague experience of the numinous. The intellectual demand on the man who knew God as 'exultation' was as imperative as the demand on the romantic lover. As the lover must pass from the adoration of the beloved to the perception of the arithmetic of God's glory, so everyone who experienced the 'rush of power' must press on to the recognition of God as 2 + 2 = 4.[2] In a contribution to a periodical called Good Speech published in April 1938 - the year of He Came Down from Heaven - he spoke of the necessity for dogmatic definition in the Christian faith.

> It is not dogma that creates narrowness; it is the inability to ask an infinite number of questions about dogma. That is where the medievals scored; they were always asking questions.[3]

I have already mentioned the way in which Williams discusses the Covenant and have maintained that he saw its transcension in only one

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1 Antic Hay (First published 1923). Penguin ed., p.7.

2 Cf. The Figure of Beatrice
> ... the quality of Beatrice is not only a sensitive (sensuously apprehended) but an intellectual thing. The recollection of her moves the rational part, even if she no more affects the sensitive, and this rational part can, to a certain extent, still loose her image on the sensitive. (p.31)

3 The Image of the City, p.57.

other mathematical pattern - the Incarnation. In the sixth chapter of He Came Down from Heaven, 'The Practice of Substituted Love' he fastens on a sentence in St.Matthew's account of the Crucifixion: the taunt flung by the chief priests, scribes and the elders, 'He saved others; himself he cannot save', and says

> It was an exact definition of the kingdom of heaven in operation, and of the great discovery of substitution which was then made by earth.[1]

The significant words here are 'exact' and 'substitution'. The contractual clauses of the Covenant and the Law in ancient Israel were a feeling towards the definition of the proper relation between heaven and earth, God and man. It was a step towards the restoration of the Paradisal life which had been lost in the Fall, but in itself totally inadequate; at best a melancholy reminder of what had once been and a shadowy precursor of a contract which was to come. The Incarnation was to be an exact definition; exact because it was to be couched in the terms of 'substitution'. And the concept of substitution contains the distinctive features of Williams's doctrines of man and salvation.

These doctrines are fully developed in He Came Down from Heaven, but the place from which to start a detailed examination is, once again, the early poetry. Crude and facile as so many of the earlier poems are, they nonetheless cannot be ignored. I have already drawn attention to the sonnet sequence of the third volume Divorce and the idea of organic

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1 p.83.

unity and diversity in human life suggested by the line 'the plotted comprehension of all souls'. In the fourth collection, Windows of Night, Williams elaborates the idea in three stanzas of the poem Domesticity and actually uses an image - that of the web - that figures prominently in He Came Down from Heaven.

> Fear or more than fear? O Earth's body, what pain
> Tightens the whole fine nervous web? what ache
> In the torn bloody past twitches our brain?
> Is it in the mind alone that memory lies? (Stanza 2)
>
> Without and within sleep parts from the world in a moan
> Of universal memory, presences dwelling alive
> In wrathful elements, victims whose hurt we condone
> Using the means whereby they were brought to doom.
> (Stanza 4)
>
> His /man's/ purposes, his past, my doleful body shares,
> Morning by morning accepting the terrible sun,
> Bathing or lighting a fire or going downstairs
> What old companions around us, see, in our first need?
> (Stanza 6)[1]

The individual metaphors lack precision and clarity, but the main line of Williams's thought can be discerned. All men belong together, joined by an indestructible bond. A man is a cell of a vast complex organism. The actions and thoughts of a single individual affect the whole of the web. The sorrows, pains and joys of one are actually felt in the lives of others - here, in this poem, - in the very bodies of others. All men are not only utterly dependent on each other, they live, in some mysterious way, in each other. This concept was later to be defined by the term 'co-inherence'.

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1 Windows of Night, pp.22-23.

Domesticity is a poem written out of frustration and suffering: it has the ring of a personal statement and suggests an undertone of bitterness. The phrase which lives on in the memory of the reader is '... tightens the whole fine nervous web'. This is an apprehension of men living out the consequences of Original Sin. The web, the union of all men with each other, is a simple fact of creation. By reason of the Fall this fact is known under another mode - as antagonism. In consequence the web is experienced as inescapable pain and sorrow. But the sixth chapter of He Came Down from Heaven speaks of 'the web of glory'. This is a description of the kingdom of heaven in which the consequences of the Fall have been transformed and creation shines with a restored splendour.

> The courtesies of that life are common enough - to lend a book, for example is a small motion in it, an article of the web of glory.[1]

It is characteristic of Williams that the grand theological assertion should be linked to the commonplace activities of daily life - the lending of the book. The sentence is a brief re-affirmation of that which was first perceived in the early poem To Michal. On bringing her breakfast in bed. In the novel Descent Into Hell the intimate relation between everyday activities and the grand designs of heaven and hell is one of the major themes.

The actual structure of the web of glory is defined in detail in the

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1 p.87.

following way:

> We are to love each other <u>as</u> he loved us, laying down our lives <u>as</u> he did, that this love may be perfected. We are to love each other, that is, by acts of substitution. We are to be substituted and to bear substitution. All life is to be vicarious - at least, all life in the kingdom of heaven is to be vicarious. The difference between life in the kingdom and life outside the kingdom is to be this.[1]

It would be reasonable to suppose that Williams's doctrine derives from, or is closely connected to, the Pauline conception of the Church as the Body of Christ. The ideas of human solidarity, of organic unity and of interdependence, are not merely common to the thinking of both men, but are vital elements in their theologies of salvation. The derivation is, however, by an indirect route and the relation, at its closest, is oblique. Williams uses the statements of Paul in a highly individual way, and his definition of the detailed construction of the web of solidarity shows a religious sensibility radically different from that of the Apostle. Substitution is the key-word in this area of Williams's theology and his use of it separates him not only from Paul, but makes him unique in the history of Christian thought. Neither baptism nor justification by faith, themes central to Pauline writings, are mentioned by Williams, and the human body as an analogy for the Church seems hardly to have interested him. Paul is referred to, directly, on only two occasions, and his advice to the church in Galatia 'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ'[2] is interpreted by Williams in

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1 p.86.

2 <u>Epistle to the Galatians</u>, Ch.VI, v.2.

terms of both literal and mystical substitution.

> Saint Paul's injunction is to such acts as 'fulfil the law of Christ', that is to acts of substitution. To take over the grief or the fear or the anxiety of another is precisely that; and precisely that is less practised than praised.[1]

Throughout this chapter there is the emphatic repetition of the vicarious nature of real human existence. Substitution is the definition, not merely an element, of the redeemed life. 'Living for others' is a phrase that has to be understood in absolutely literal terms. It is not merely a pious way of describing the search for holiness or salvation. The word 'for' entails actual substitution. Men are to substitute themselves for each other, to take over and endure suffering and difficulty instead of, i.e. in the place of, others. This is the interdependence which Williams was to investigate more deeply in his writings on 'co-inherence'. For him it was sheer impossibility that any man could save himself. What was true of Christ's action on the cross must be true of all men's actions everywhere and at all times. 'He saved others, himself he cannot save'. Our salvation is wrought by others, and to practise substitution is the only means of general salvation. The law of exchange is the only law of the kingdom of heaven. Eight years before the publication of He Came Down from Heaven Williams wrote a letter to Alice Hadfield in which the doctrine of substitution is outlined and commended for its sheer factual accuracy.

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1 p.88.

> I have a point to discuss with you: which has made me wonder whether the New Testament may not be merely true in some of its advice. All about "bearing one another's burdens". I have an awful (full of awe) feeling that one can. The older I get the more amazed I become at the pure convenience of - what we call Love.[1]

At the heart of Williams's belief lies the unalterable conviction of the 'practicality' of the metaphysical formulae. The novels, Descent Into Hell and All Hallows Eve, manifest this conviction, for they are, among other things, his attempt at portraying the operation of 'substituted love' at the level of everyday existence.

Descent Into Hell.

John Heath-Stubbs places Williams's last two novels in a category apart from the rest and says that they are 'dark and difficult books, in which the sense of evil has become oppressive, and the characters pass across the frontiers which separate the living and the dead.'[2] It could never be argued that either of them is a great novel, but it is equally impossible to regard them merely in the light of 'supernatural thrillers' or to dismiss them lightly as 'entertainments'. All of Williams's novels have a serious purpose but none of the five earlier ones engages the reader's imagination in the way that these last two do. There are moments in these books when Williams, as novelist and not merely as expositor of peculiar ideas, achieves his purpose brilliantly. These are moments in which the reader is made to feel that the familiar outlines

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1 Hadfield, pp.139-140.

2 Charles Williams, p.31.

of his normal existence in the material world are really capable of dissolving into new shapes which hold elements of wonder and horror. These novels are in a category apart, not because they are 'dark and difficult' or because Williams introduces new themes, but because his ability to persuade the reader of the seriousness of his themes seems to have intensified in the years which separated The Greater Trumps and Descent Into Hell. This intensification makes itself felt in two areas in particular.

The first is that of character. In the figure of Pauline Anstruther, upon whom the whole novel depends, Williams has managed to create a character which begins to fulfil E.M. Forster's requirement for successful characterisation - that of being seen 'in the round'.[1] The characters of the earlier novels are, nearly all of them, stock-figures, or, possibly worse still, ciphers. Intimations of Williams's ability to create 'living' people can be found earlier than in Descent Into Hell - Isabel in Shadows of Ecstasy, Lord Arglay in Many Dimensions and Nancy in The Greater Trumps are examples - but none of these reaches that stage of development at which the reader is able to respond imaginatively and immediately to the predicament of the character. This response occurs in Descent Into Hell, and, in a more remarkable way, in All Hallows Eve where the reader finds himself entering into the experience of Lester Furnival, a person who is dead.

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1 Aspects of the Novel (1922, Pocket edition, 1949), Ch.IV.

The second area is that of the relation between the two orders of reality, natural and supernatural. As has already been said, this theme is basic to every novel and the success of its presentation, to a large extent, governs the success of the novel as a whole. What is noticeable about Descent Into Hell is the ease, sureness and 'quietness' with which unearthly occurrences are introduced into the realistic setting. There is no obvious heightening of excitement, as can be found in War in Heaven; it is the least shrill of all the novels in its tone. We are given a picture of a world in which spiritual and material, earthly and heavenly, past and present are in constant contact. There is barely a moment when the reader is not aware that the whole 'natural' world of Battle Hill (the location of the action) is surrounded by, and contained within, a supernatural sphere.

It is possible to trace a growing sense of the co-inherence of the two worlds through Williams's novels. At first, as in War in Heaven and The Place of the Lion, the unearthly erupts with a violent suddenness into human life. But in The Greater Trumps, although the predominant sense is still that of terrifying cosmic forces unleashed in the ordinary world, there is a further underlying suggestion that within and behind the everyday phenomena, co-inhering, in fact, the supernatural lies hidden. In All Hallows Eve the idea of co-inherent existences reaches its perfect expression as the author switches backwards and forwards from Lester Furnival's world of the dead to her husband's world of the living without exciting the slightest feeling of incongruity. Furthermore the more spectacular aspects of occult events, so much to the fore

in the earlier novels, are absent (apart from one bad slip) from the later ones. This does not mean that heaven and hell have been domesticated, it means that everyday life has been more closely intertwined with the unearthly order. The presence of the supernatural 'in the middest' emphasises the capacity of all human beings to experience the joys and terrors of heaven and hell even in the performance of trivial daily tasks.

As the title Descent Into Hell indicates, the novel is concerned to examine those two states of being known in the Christian tradition as Heaven and Hell. It is a book about salvation and damnation and revolves around the two characters Pauline Anstruther and Lawrence Wentworth. They hardly come into contact with each other in the course of the book, but their lives form an exact counter-point in the development of the theme. Earlier novels had also broached these subjects, but nearly always, the presentation of salvation is less vivid than that of damnation. It is relevant to recall the two sketches of a descent into hell in the figures of Gregory Persimmons in War in Heaven and Giles Tumulty in Many Dimensions. But if one is to look for a blueprint for Lawrence Wentworth's damnation one must return to the book of literary criticism The English Poetic Mind and to the discussion of Paradise Lost. Of the revolt and exile of Satan Williams says,

> It is a state well known to man. The skies and the abysses, the archangels and the chaotic powers, of this poem are not necessary to our recognition of it; nor by them is our capacity for a similar choice awakened. The corner of a suburban road, a metropolitan doorway, are equally adequate surroundings; were those other necessary Paradise Lost would be more spectacular and

> less essential poetry. Milton stresses the moral choice of the contradiction, the choice which so many men have made, the preference for the existence of their own will as the final and absolute thing as against the knowledge (whatever that may be) of some 'great commanded good'.[1]

Like all Williams's writings on Milton, this passage at one and the same time illuminates and over-simplifies. The idea of the moral choice is, as Williams says, essential to the poem, but so is the spectacularity - 'the skies and the abysses'. This is what makes Paradise Lost the difficult and disturbing poem it is. Williams's concept of hell is, I believe, more clearly expressed than Milton's, and closer to the definitions of orthodox Christianity. It is, moreover, a more terrible vision than Milton's for like Dante's it is not bound up with spectacularity; it lies close to the heart of trivial, mundane existence. 'The corner of a suburban road, a metropolitan doorway' are precisely and literally the location of hell in Descent Into Hell. In the second novel, War in Heaven, it will be remembered, Gregory Persimmons managed to meet the Lord of Hell only by the elaborate preparations of a black magic ritual. In Descent Into Hell Adela Hunt discovers that the door of an innocuous-looking shed in a dusty yard opens directly on to the path of the damned; Pauline Anstruther sees her own terrifying image, the Doppelganger, advancing quietly along the pavement of her own street; Lawrence Wentworth is visited by a succubus, but it is a creature he has himself formed out of his own perverted imagination and is horribly

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1 The English Poetic Mind, p.123.

congruous in the familiar surroundings of his own garden.

Faber & Faber's standard edition of Williams's novels carries a blurb on the dust cover of Descent Into Hell which misleadingly states that 'the theme of all his novels is the struggle between good and evil'. The suggestion is one of metaphysical, and possibly extra-terrestrial, conflict. But the novel provides no justification for this attribution of dualism. There is, of course, conflict, and conflict of a terrible kind, but it is a conflict which takes place within the characters and not beyond them: it is the individual spiritual conflict of the human soul in its effort to choose and perform those thoughts and actions which lead to human fulfilment and ultimate salvation, and to reject those thoughts and actions which stultify and distort and eventually bring chaos and damnation. In Descent Into Hell Williams remains true to those theological principles he outlines in He Came Down from Heaven: evil has no real existence, heaven defines hell, all perfected life in the kingdom of God is vicarious. An examination of the way in which Williams traces Lawrence Wentworth's movement towards that state of utter hopelessness, called hell, will demonstrate the consistency of his religious outlook.

At the beginning of the book Wentworth is pictured as a pleasant resident of Battle Hill, remarkable in the community for his scholarship; kindly for the most part and well-disposed towards his neighbours and acquaintances; self-indulgent, perhaps, even selfish, but by no means depraved or corrupt. In common with all men he is subject to temptation and possesses weaknesses which are sometimes overcome and sometimes

submitted to. By temperament he is a jealous and possessive man and he is vulnerable to two kinds of attack - sexual and professional.

Emotionally aroused by the provocative young woman Adela Hunt, he resents her association with the young man Hugh Prescott whom he senses, quite correctly, as a rival for Adela's affections. One evening he lies in wait for them as they return from the railway station.

> Wentworth stood there [at his window] now for some seconds, exercising a no more conscious but a still more deliberate choice. He also yielded - to the chaos within rather than the chaos without .... A remnant of intelligence cried to him that this was the road of mania, and self-indulgence leading to mania. Self-preservation itself urged him to remain; lucidity urged him; if not love. He stood and looked and listened .... He would not go to spy; he would go for a walk. He went out of the room, down the soft, swift stairs of his mind, into the streets of his mind, to find the phantoms of his mind. He desired hell.[1]

This passage, Wentworth's first yielding to the temptation, sets the pattern for his whole descent. First there is the stress on the self-enclosure of the situation and the stifling narrowness of the action. No external force prompts him to his decision, he fights the battle within the limits of his own personality. Williams underlines this point by giving the scene a sudden surrealistic twist; 'the soft, swift stairs of his mind'. Throughout the novel this surrealistic device crops up in the story of Wentworth, and in the end the reader is forced to see the whole of the natural world through the distorting, self-reflecting lens of Wentworth's interior eye. He goes out to meet the images he has himself created. This scene is the beginning of his refusal to meet

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1 Descent Into Hell, pp.49-50.

the demands of the real world and shows the start of that process by which the imagination is perverted. Secondly, there is the author's emphasis on the freedom and deliberateness of the choice. This does not mean that Williams lapses into a kind of Pelagianism in which the issues of morality can be clearly apprehended and calmly decided upon. His writing conveys not only the confusion of mind and the painful frustration of the character but also, in the use of the image of hunger a few lines previously, the force and attraction of the perverted desire. Nonetheless, in the last analysis, the choice remains a responsible, freely-willed one. But as the novel progresses it is possible to observe the way in which each wrong choice increases the blindness in the mind and heart of Wentworth until the process of perversion is complete and the ability to recognise choice has been lost altogether. Thirdly, there is the emphasis on the sheer foolishness of Wentworth's decision. Again and again in his critique of Paradise Lost Williams harks back to the idea that Satan was simply wrong: that the proposed defiance of the Omnipotence was nothing more than stupidity. In a similar manner, in his interpretation of the Divine Comedy he draws attention to the fact that the souls of the damned are the souls of those who have 'lost the good of intellect', who, through their consistent refusal to recognise the facts of life have become incapable of seeing a difference between good and evil, and are thus condemned to eternal blindness and perversion. In this passage from Descent Into Hell Williams shows in Wentworth one standing at the beginning of the long process of self-delusion - 'lucidity urged him, if not love'.

The second of Wentworth's temptations - to professional jealousy - presents itself in the shape of the honour accorded to a rival in his own field of scholarship, military history. One morning Wentworth opens his newspaper to find that a knighthood has been bestowed on the historian Aston Moffatt, and a terrible choice once again faces him.

> There was presented to him at once and clearly an opportunity for joy - casual, accidental joy, but joy. If he could not manage joy, at least he might have managed the intention of joy. The infinity of grace could have been contented and invoked by a mere mental refusal of anything but such an effort.[1]

The real nature of the sin of jealousy is outlined in these few words. As distinct from envy, it is not rooted in the desire to possess what another has. It is a more insidious vice and more destructive in its consequences. It is the hatred of another's happiness, and the desire to destroy it. If one cannot, oneself, possess the happiness, in jealousy one fixes one's will upon the prevention of another possessing it. This passage contains also a deep sense of the love and mercy of God ('the infinity'). In that area of his being where man is, of necessity, responsible for his own salvation it is not the achievement of a moral perfection and personal holiness that saves him. Williams's doctrine of salvation is as far from a 'justification by works' as was St. Paul's. The more effort towards joy will save a man. But having said that, one must also say that Williams saw the effort to joy as a moral and metaphysical obligation for all human beings, and one remembers

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1 Ibid., p.80.

the character of Chloe Burnett in Many Dimensions who regarded the failure to cause gaiety as a 'failure in morals'.[1] The effort to joy is quite simply an effort to love, so that if a catch-phrase could be used to describe the doctrine of salvation, it would be 'justification by love', love described in the most precise terms.

The pages which follow Wentworth's refusal to make an effort towards joy demonstrate the penetration of Williams's psychological insight. Burning with resentment and disappointment, Wentworth seeks immediate consolation of another kind in the creatures of his own imagination. The theme of sexual jealousy is woven into that of professional jealousy at this point, for the minute he refuses the offered joy in Moffatt's happiness, a spectre appears; a woman with the features and sensuality of Adela Hunt. Williams calls her Lilith, echoing the Rabbinic legend of Adam's first wife who turned into a demon. But Wentworth's succubus is of his own creation and no demon. Williams stresses the point of this fantastic perversion of the work of the human imagination by introducing, in a rather confused passage, an initially puzzling quotation from the Divine Comedy. At the top of the mountain of Purgatory Dante reaches the place where he is re-united with the girl whom he first adored in the streets of Florence many years before, and he is greeted by her with the words 'ben sem, ben sem, Beatrice' - we are, we are Beatrice. (Canto XXX) The recognition of the authority of the beloved is crucial to the scene:

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1 Many Dimensions, p.50.

her first words are words of rebuke. She is, in Williams's terminology, an inescapable fact which the lover has to acknowledge. No love relationship can exist unless each lover recognises the independent reality of the other partner. Lilith operates as the anti-type of Beatrice. Where Beatrice upbraids Dante and reduces him to tears, Lilith is utterly compliant to Wentworth's demands. In the Divine Comedy Beatrice is an agent of salvation, in Descent Into Hell the succubus is the symbol of damnation. Nothing exists for Wentworth other than the self-created image in the self-indulgent world of his own mind. He becomes so obsessed with his fantasy that he fails, in the end, to notice even the real Adela when she turns to him. His imagination copulates incestuously with its own offspring. But his descent is not complete until everything has been rejected: including the figures upon which his imagination has been feeding. Hell is the place of complete self-absorption, and even Lilith is cast away finally.

> He sat down and his creature crept up to him and took and nuzzled his hand. As she did so he became aware for the first time that he did not altogether want her .... Even she was a betrayal, she was a thing outside.[1]

As a portrayal of damnation Descent Into Hell succeeds in a way that no other work in English literature has been able to. It is, I believe, more accurate in its spiritual insight and more convincing about the real existence of hell than, for example, either Paradise Lost or Dr. Faustus. Both Milton's and Marlowe's works have elements of tragedy about them,

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1 p.199.

for both Satan and Faustus retain elements of nobility in their 'descent'. Williams also manages to convince us of the inexorability of the process without ever suggesting a doctrine of predestination. A moral choice is offered to Wentworth at each stage of the descent and the slightest gesture could have saved him from the final horror and madness. At the close of the first part of The Pilgrim's Progress, when Christian arrives at the shining City, Bunyan tells us that at the very gate of heaven there is a way to hell. In Descent Into Hell Williams describes the complementary experience: at the very mouth of hell a path can be found which leads to heaven.

> If he [Wentworth] had ever hated Sir Aston because of a passion for austere truth, he might even then have laid hold on the thing that was abroad in the world and been saved. If he had been hopelessly wrong in his facts and yet believed them so, and believed they were important in themselves, he might have felt a touch of the fire in which the Marian martyr had gone to his glory, and still have been saved .... He looked at Sir Aston and thought, not, "He was wrong in his facts', but "I've been cheated".[1]

But the path is ignored and the irrevocable choice is made. Wentworth facing the choice common to all academics, artists, performers and even lovers turns away from his love of the thing (history) itself to a concern with himself as historian and himself as rejected. The absolute concentration on self brings the ultimate isolation of hell. And in the closing pages of the novel damnation is known, not as the vindictive judgment of a God, but as the inexorable outcome of the continual, freely-willed rejection of known truth and the experience of disinterested joy.

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1 p.219.

It is, perhaps, because Williams ends his novel on a note of utter desolation that the immediate impression left on the reader is that of prevailing darkness, but, in fact, in the novel as a whole the sense of joy and liberation is as vividly present as that of hopelessness and imprisonment. This brings us to the character of Pauline Anstruther whose development forms the exact counterpart of Wentworth's. And it is in the presentation of Pauline's progress to salvation that Williams concretely depicts those doctrines adumbrated theologically in He Came Down from Heaven. Her life is the precise definition of love in action. At the centre of the book stands a chapter whose heading is almost identical with the sixth chapter of the essay: 'The Doctrine of Substituted Love'. The substance of the chapter is a conversation between Pauline and the poet Peter Stanhope,[1] a conversation which begins with Stanhope's observation that the girl is living under a severe strain; a strain moreover that is not accounted for merely by the fact that she is nursing a dying grandmother. Her distress has the delineation of fear and turns out to have a strange cause: she is haunted by a ghostly vision of herself, her own mirror-image, a Doppelganger. Why Williams chose this melodramatic notion, beloved by many of the Romantics as a symbol of fear, is inexplicable, but it is not unsuccessful. He makes no attempt at giving a psychological explanation as to why the terror should manifest itself in this particular form, he allows the image to operate at the purely literary level of a 'conventional' symbol. It

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1 Peter Stanhope had been an early nom de plume of Williams himself.

accords well with the world of Battle Hill in which the frontiers of normal, material existence dissolve easily and without warning to reveal the presence of both the preternaturally horrible and the preternaturally beautiful. Moreover, late in the story Williams puts the ghostly figure to good use. Stanhope, understanding the girl's bewilderment and dread, offers a way of release. The starting-point is, once again, the injunction of the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians, 'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ'. Stanhope, and Williams through Stanhope, interprets this literally

> But I think when Christ or St. Paul, or whoever said bear ... he meant something much more like carrying a parcel instead of someone else. To bear a burden is precisely to carry it instead of.[1]

The law of Christ is, of course, love, and we are reminded of Williams's remark in the letter to Alice Hadfield, which has already been quoted, that love is not merely beautiful but useful. In operation it has the power to relieve distress and bring freedom and joy at the level of ordinary human life. Williams sees, in the words of the Apostle, love defining its method of operation, and that method is the method of substitution. Stanhope insists not only on the possibility of one human being suffering for (instead of) another, but on the necessity of doing so if salvation is to be achieved. 'All life in the kingdom is to be vicarious'.[2] But the act of substituted love is subject to the law of

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1 p.93.

2 He Came Down from Heaven, p.86.

exchange. It is not possible to take another's burden by force, it must be freely given. Stanhope cannot endure the fear and bewilderment of Pauline if she will not allow him to, but the rejection of his offer could be the first step towards that self-enclosed independence which, finally, is hell. Pauline in the acceptance of his love is made aware of the web of creation whose pattern is substitution and exchange. In the same way that she uses him she must be prepared to be used by others. And later in the novel she is used by others in strange and terrible ways.

Pauline, in this conversation, naturally questions Stanhope's doctrine, asking how it is possible that an actual suffering - a pain, a betrayal, a loss, or in her case, the fear of the Doppelganger - can be given away. Stanhope denies that he is offering to remove the fact.

> "And if I see it after all?" she asked. "But not 'after all'," he said. "The fact remains - but see how different a fact, if it can't be dreaded! ...."[1]

Stanhope's offer must be read in the light of Williams's interpretation of the Fall in He Came Down from Heaven. The key-phrase of the interpretation is 'All difference consists in the mode of knowledge'.[2] The action of substituted love can be seen as a reversal of Original Sin for, again, all difference is in the way of knowing. The fact - the disease, the loss, the Doppelganger - remains, but the way in which it is endured and known can be transformed by the action of substitution.

In a delicately expressed and deeply perceptive paragraph Williams

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1 Descent Into Hell, p. 100.

2 He Came Down from Heaven, p. 21.

describes the difference in the suffering between those who endure the fact and those who have made the substitutionary act.

> The body of his flesh received her alien terror, his mind carried the burden of her world. The burden was inevitably lighter for him than for her, for the rage of a personal resentment was lacking. He endured her sensitiveness, but not her sin; the substitution there, if indeed there is a substitution, is hidden in the central mystery of Christendom which Christendom itself has never understood, nor can.[1]

With the slightly rhetorical flourish 'the central mystery of Christendom' Williams introduces his doctrine of the Atonement. In the freely-willed suffering of Stanhope for Pauline we are given an image of the atoning death of Christ. All acts of substitution are types of, and are consummated by, His act on the Cross. Individual men have the power, and the necessity to exercise that power is laid upon them by the condition of their creation, to assist in the redemption of others, and, in turn, they depend upon the loving activity of others for their own salvation. But only Christ has the power to bear the burden of the whole of humanity and redeem the whole web of creation.

It is clear from The Descent of the Dove and The Christian Year that Williams was familiar with the letters of the martyr-bishop of the primitive church, Ignatius. It might be that it is from these letters, with their intense devotion to Christ's passion, that Williams received the idea of Atonement as a substitutionary action performed to perfection by Christ but, strangely and paradoxically, imitated and completed in the lives of individual human beings. Furthermore it can be shown that

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1 Descent Into Hell, p.101.

Ignatius was not alone in his belief that he could act as substitute for his others by his own suffering and death. H.E.W. Turner in his study of the Early Church The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption claims

> That this [the idea of substitution] is no personal idiosyncrasy, born of the teeming brain of the martyr-bishop of Antioch, is proved by the fact that the same theory underlies the claim of the confessors, 'the spoilt children of the Early Church', during the periods of general persecution to act as an alternative channel of reconciliation beside the developing penitential system. Their suffering for Christ, like His for them, could avail to atone for sin.[1]

It is impossible, however, to be dogmatic about Williams's sources, and, in any case, what is of real importance is the way he develops his theory and presents it, with his distinctive sensibility, in terms of the everyday lives of men and women.

At the conclusion of the conversation, Stanhope is left meditating on the words that have been spoken and the offer he has made. The meditation ends in a curious way, with echoes of Thomas Aquinas's definition of God as 'actus purus' and his discussion on the Eternity of God in the Summa Theologica.[2]

> The act of substitution was fully made; and if it had been necessarily delayed for years (could that have been), but not by his fault, still its result would have preceded it. In the place of the Omnipotence there is neither before nor after; there is only fact.[3]

The historical process of cause and effect in the time sequence of the material world has no meaning in the world of love. Love belongs to the

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1 The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption (London, 1952), pp.29-30.

2 Summa Theologica, Pt.I, Question x, Article I.

3 Descent Into Hell, p.102.

eternal life of God, (the Omnipotence) and the exercise of love means participation in that life. As Williams points out in The Descent of the Dove, in Eternity there can be no duration, so in the Christian life there is a real sense in which it can be said that there is neither past nor future but only now, the immediacy of Eternity.[1] The dissolution of the conventional time sequence which was portrayed rather crudely in the earlier novel Many Dimensions is here more subtly and convincingly conveyed. The framework of the novel is clearer and the supernatural more consistently present, so that one is always aware of Eternity surrounding and containing the personal and communal histories of Battle Hill and its inhabitants.

The climactic point of the novel and the demonstration of the unity of all time in the life of the Omnipotence is Pauline's meeting with her ancestor, a martyr in the Marian persecutions of four centuries before. The reader is prepared for this meeting at the close of the eighth chapter when a power contained within the verse of Stanhope's play helps Pauline herself to recognise the co-inherence of all existence.

> ... perhaps even now he burned, and she and her friends danced, and her grandmother died and lived, and Peter Stanhope wrote his verse, and all the past of the Hill was one with its present. It lived; it intermingled; not among those living alone did the doctrine of substituted love bear rule.[2]

Once the limitations of the time sequence have been destroyed there is no reason why cause and effect should operate sequentially. It would have

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1 The Descent of the Dove, p.14.

2 p.151.

been possible for Stanhope to bear Pauline's burden of fear long after the girl herself had ceased to be afraid. In fact, this turns out to be the pattern of her own effort of substitution, and Stanhope's meditation, like Pauline's sudden realisation of co-inherence at the dress rehearsal, prepares the reader for the extraordinary scene in which Pauline takes over the pain and fear of her dying ancestor.

In He Came Down from Heaven Williams discusses the way in which, in the Incarnation and Atonement, all things can be known as occasions of joy and evil itself can be transfigured and experienced as good. (O felix culpa) In the chapter 'The Tryst of the Worlds' he depicts this doctrine dramatically. The horror and pain of Pauline's life symbolised by the Doppelganger becomes an occasion of joy. Fortified by the love of Stanhope she is able to face the terrifying figure as it approaches her down the dark street. When it reaches her she realises that it is not her own mirror-image after all, but the figure of her ancestor John Struther burning with fear and despair at the thought of his impending death. She knows what she must do and, offering to bear his pain, she gives him release.

> Pauline sighed deeply with her joy. This then, after so long, was their meeting and their reconciliation; their perfect reconciliation, for this other had done what she had desired, and yet not the other, but she, for it was she who had all her life carried a fear which was not her fear but another's, until in the end it had become for her in turn not hers but another's.[1]

Stanhope and Pauline are not the only characters in the novel who perform these acts of love, nor are all the acts of substitution as

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1 p.170.

simple as those performed by the poet and the girl. Pauline's grandmother dying peacefully and hopefully acts in her last hours for the soul of a dead man who, years before during the building of the Battle Hill estate, had hanged himself in frustration and despair and now wanders in a cold, lonely world seeking the release which only the love of another can give him. We are not supplied with the details of Margaret Anstruther's action but are merely shown the way her acceptance of death procures his liberation. All salvation is to be achieved vicariously. The life of the kingdom is a pattern of exchange, and the person who refuses the operation, as does Lawrence Wentworth, excludes himself from the kingdom.

Williams refers to this pattern of life by various names in his writings. Here it is presented under the image of the city,[1] a symbol intended to convey, primarily, the inter-dependence of all separate existences. Williams makes it quite clear that inter-dependence is not a condition created by faith, but is simply a fact of creation. And the way to salvation is no more than to recognise and accept the fact. Wentworth, like the condemned souls of Dante's Hell, in refusing the city refuses the fact. There is a scene in which Wentworth, hiding himself in the dark lane near the railway station jealously waiting the return of Adela and Hugh from London, allows Williams to introduce the image of the heavenly city into his resentful cogitations on the earthly city.

> ... he would have a world in which no one went to the City, because there was no City unless he - but no, he wouldn't have a City. Adela ....[2]

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1 He mentions also the 'republic' (pp.27 and 28) but the image is not developed.

2 p.87.

Throughout his work Williams emphasises factuality. He depicts human life as a striving after reality and salvation as the achievement of the knowledge of reality. Christianity is the great religion of facts, not merely (though certainly) because it takes historical occurrences seriously, but because its dogmas deal with things as they are; the actual structures of human life. It speaks of love and it speaks of it in mathematical terms, and according to Williams both geometry and the romantic vision are indestructible facts of human existence. There is no better way of concluding this discussion of Descent Into Hell than by quoting a passage which demonstrates his unique religious sensibility. Margaret Anstruther approaching her death meditates on love in a way that exactly parallels the theology of He Came Down from Heaven.

> The approach by love was the approach to fact; to love anything but fact was not love. Love was even more mathematical than poetry; it was the pure mathematics of the spirit. It was applied also and active; it was the means as it was the end. The end lived everlastingly in the means; the means eternally in the end.[1]

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1 p.69.

CHAPTER IV

1939 - 1942

The declaration of war on the third of September 1939 brought about a radical change in the pattern of Charles Williams's private life. As the plans for the 'evacuation' of the Oxford University Press took effect, Williams, who had spent all the years of his adult life in the city of London, suddenly found himself in the quiet provincial atmosphere of a small university town. The establishment at Amen House was broken up, and the headquarters of the Press moved to Southfield House in east Oxford. On the fourth of September Williams left London - permanently as it happens, for the Press remained in 'evacuation' throughout the war and Williams died only eight days after the German surrender at Rheims on the seventh of May, 1945. This sudden change of environment made little difference to his work. It is true that by 1939 his mind and sensibility had reached the stage of full maturity, but it also seems as though he was a man who was hardly affected by his immediate physical surroundings: if he was, it made no impression on his work. His literary output in those last five years continued to be prodigious. Besides the lectures and tutorials he gave in the University, he contributed articles and reviews at regular, and frequent, intervals to

a number of periodicals,[1] he wrote another biography, six more plays, one more novel, five substantial theological essays, and the second part of the Arthurian sequence, The Region of the Summer Stars. The fourth division of his work (1939-1942) includes the history of the Church, The Descent of the Dove; his study in witchcraft; the sequel to He Came Down from Heaven, entitled The Forgiveness of Sins; and all but one of the most important contributions to periodicals and journals.

These are the major works of the period, but there are a few minor ones which are not without interest - if only for the further evidence they supply of the 'essential unity' of all Williams's creative activity. They are the plays, three of which, Judgement at Chelmsford, The House by the Stable, and The Death of Good Fortune were written in 1939, and one, Grab and Grace which was completed two years earlier. I have already ventured the opinion that one of the dominant influences on Williams's dramatic writing was the tradition of the English masque. I find this view confirmed, though in an indirect way, by John Heath-Stubbs in his claim that Williams's later development

> may be better understood if we think of it as parallel to, though independent of, that achieved by Yeats in his later plays, rather than following the line of Mr. Eliot's verse drama.[2]

It is sure that Williams's plays bear little resemblance to Eliot's, he had neither Eliot's poetic genius nor his sense, limited as it was, of the

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1 The periodical Time and Tide, for example, received hundreds of contributions from him at approximately fortnightly intervals.

2 Collected Plays, pp.vi-vii.

modern theatre. But the dramas of Yeats and Williams closely resemble each other in their fundamental ceremoniousness; and ceremony is the essence of the masque. Both men seemed incapable of convincing characterisation, and their plays frequently have the appearance of a series of poetically inter-related operatic arias set in a loose framework of dramatic action. The literary critic T.R. Henn in his detailed study of Yeats's poetry describes the theatrical ideals of the Irish poet in a way that would be entirely appropriate in a discussion of Williams's dramatic efforts.

> His theatre was first intended to be one of beautiful speech, of romance, of extravagence, that should at the same time stir into life the imagination of the people. ... Yeats desired a theatre of great speech, elimination of unnecessary action, and the stylization of what remained; in which dramatic tension is built up by the resonances of image and symbols.[1]

Williams, unlike Eliot, nowhere outlined his own intentions for the theatre, but in an article on religious drama for a periodical called Good Speech (1938) he trenchantly attacked modern religious plays on the grounds that they lacked 'style'. The affinity with Yeats can clearly be seen.

> I would not go quite so far as to say that our present business is to invent a 'demnition horrid' outline, and fill it with grace and beauty of a style, but that, I feel, is, at least a fairly safe intention.[2]

It is the kind of intention which operates in his own plays, and when we remember, in this context, that Williams nearly always associated courtesy, grace, and formality with the word 'style', it is possible to recognise

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1 The Lonely Tower (London, 1950), pp.213-214.

2 The Image of the City, p.58.

the accuracy of John Heath-Stubbs's observation.

Judgement at Chelmsford, commissioned for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the diocese of Chelmsford is, by far, the most ambitious play of this period, and can be called ambitious by any standard of theatrical production. It is, in fact, not a play at all, but a large-scale dramatic pageant, divided not into Acts but Episodes involving dozens of characters, singing parts, and choruses. Consequently, it is, of necessity, static and ritualistic with interest focussed on allegorical representation in the text and on dignified physical (almost dance) movement in the actual performance. Inevitably, much of the script is now dated, and all the attempts at realistic characterisation have the stilted, artificial quality of Eliot's attempts at naturalistism in the prose dialogue of his own pageant The Rock. And, as in the case of The Rock, the most effective moments of Judgement at Chelmsford occur in the 'operatic' speeches of the chorus. It is, at best, a work adequate to the occasion for which it was commissioned, though from time to time Williams's distinctive religious vision infuses the language with a power that communicates the message vividly. The dry comment of the See of Canterbury 'sense is one great defence against the Fall' - when we are reminded of the novel Descent Into Hell and Wentworth's submission, against the lucidity of his intellect, to temptation - is an instance of this. A more significant example is contained in the long speech of the See of Constantinople from the same scene.

> But in some exchange between the Omnipotence
> and man, in some such ravishing hour as this,
> when our incarnate and most courteous lord
> exhibits the actual unveiled beauty of the flesh
> to eyes of love; making the love and the loving,
> the lover and the beloved, the beloved and the lover,
> into a glorious mystery of himself -
> might not that be obscure reason in God?[1]

The speech develops and clarifies the implications of that scene in the novel The Greater Trumps when Nancy is shocked into a spiritual and emotional awareness by the line from the hymn 'Rise to adore the mystery of love'. The precise meaning of the phrase 'the mystery of love' is left only partly explained in the novel, here in the play it is spelled out: the mystery is Christ himself, and the speech is a verse exposition of the Christological definition of the Athanasian Creed; 'One altogether, not by confusion of substance: but by unity of Person'. Williams once again starts from the experience of love and sees the absolute perfection of the human experience in the figure of the Incarnate Lord. The union of Godhead and Manhood in Christ is defined as a union of the perfect exchange of love.

The three plays which followed Judgement at Chelmsford conform to the same basic pattern: they are intended to be modern morality plays constructed after the manner of the late Medieval play Everyman. All the characters are allegorical (apart from Mary and Joseph in The House by the Stable) and there is no attempt, except for the colloquialisms in some of the dialogue, at naturalistic representation. The House by the Stable and Grab and Grace are, and were intended to be (as Williams's

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1 Collected Plays, p.137.

title-page to the second play shows) complementary. The first is a Nativity-play, but the action itself revolves ingeniously around the traditional folk-tale of the Devil and man engaging in a game of dice for the possession of man's soul. In the second, Williams shows a nice inventiveness and freshness of theological attitude by representing Faith as a smartly-dressed and sophisticated young woman, and Grace as an impudent boy. But neither of the plays repays close examination; the dialogue is artificial and banal - even for allegorical representations - and the theological points, with one exception, are made crudely.

The single exception occurs at the very end of each play. Mary is given the closing speech in The House by the Stable, and she ends with the following words:

> Take us, O exchange of hearts! this we know -
> substance is love, love substance. Let us go.[1]

The character of Faith has the last major speech of Grab and Grace and she ends by echoing the closing line of the earlier play.

> Therefore God shall make all things well -
> O agony! O bounteous and fell judgment! - ....
> When you want me, if you want me, I shall come
> quicker than you can think. The Peace be with you,
> and Love which is the substance in all things made.[2]

The quotation from Julian of Norwich which begins this speech is not fortuitous, and the two lines which bring the words 'love' and 'substance' into such close proximity are, in effect, concentrated glosses on certain passages from Julian's Revelations of Divine Love. In the course of

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1 Ibid., p.215.

2 Ibid., p.243.

describing the fourteenth 'shewing' of God's love she speaks at some length about the relation of man's 'substantiality' to the life and the love of the Trinity.

> For ere that He made us He loved us, and when we were made we loved Him. And this is a Love that is made, (to our Kindly Substance), (by virtue) of the Kindly Substantial Goodness of the Holy Ghost .... and the fullest Substance and the highest Virtue is the blessed Soul of Christ ... and an higher understanding it is, inwardly to see and to know that our soul, that is made, dwelleth in God's Substance: of which Substance, God, we are that we are.
>
> And I saw no difference between God and our Substance: but as it were all God ....[1]

Williams does not accurately reproduce the psychology of Dame Julian, and his brief discussion of her terms 'sensualite' and 'substance' in The Descent of the Dove[2] seems to indicate, by its crudity, that he had not really understood the kind of distinction she attempted to draw between their meanings, but the general pattern of her thought is followed, and slightly extended, in these few lines. He reproduces her vigorous anti-Manicheeism. For both of them God is most profoundly experienced when the Flesh is taken most seriously; in the depths of physical pain and the heights of physical love God reveals Himself. By quoting the famous remark 'All things shall be well', Williams alludes to his own doctrine of the Fall and Redemption in which all things (including sin) are to be known as occasions of joy. Evil is to be known as good and sin is to be transformed into a means of salvation.

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1 Revelations of Divine Love. Edited by Grace Warrack (London, 1901), pp.123 ff.

2 p.224.

Julian claims that the soul was made to be God's dwelling-place, Williams that Love is the principle of being in all things that are made. Christ stands at the very centre of the pictures of both writers, for He, in the flesh, is substantial God and substantial man; so in Him the soul is knit, 'one'd', into God, and through Him the great exchange of love is made. The extension of Dame Julian's thought is to be found in the way Williams, perhaps unconsciously, reminds us of Dante in his use of the word love. It is identified, not only as a profound emotion towards a desirable object (the erotic or romantic sense), nor as the overflowing grace of God in the willed suffering of Jesus Christ (the agapetic sense), but as the principle, creative and directive, by which the whole of the universe is governed. The idea is not foreign to the thought of Dame Julian, as the closing sentences of the Revelations show, but it is impossible in this context not to be reminded of Dante; and especially of the final cantos of the Divine Comedy in which the poet describes himself being possessed at the very centre of his being by the same power - love - that controls the life and movement of the whole of creation.

The fourth of the plays, The Death of Good Fortune, begins precisely where The House by the Stable leaves off: with a speech by the Virgin Mary and the aphorism 'substance is love, love substance',[1] and the experience of romantic love is a burning issue in this play, which attempts to explicate and demonstrate the truth of the maxim that Mary

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1 Collected Plays, p.179.

enunciates towards the end of her first speech.

All chance is heavenly, all luck is good.

The play sounds strangely to twentieth century ears unaccustomed to the traditional forms of morality drama, but the plot could hardly be simpler. The allegorical figure Good Fortune, who is regarded as the source of security and happiness in the lives of the three central characters, dies. As a result, the Lover, the Old Woman, and the King suffer the destruction and the deprivation of their desire and hopes: the Lover loses the love of his beloved, the Old Woman is robbed of the money she has saved to ensure her independence, and the security of the King's rule is threatened.

The play, at one level, is yet another expression of the 'Troilus experience': the sudden reversal of an apparently stable pattern of existence; the experience of the inexplicable contradiction at the basis of life, and the 'actual schism in reason'. In outlining the sufferings of the lover Williams seems to be attempting a dramatic image of the situation of Dante which he discusses at some length in The Figure of Beatrice. Dante, having fallen deeply in love, is suddenly bereft of his beloved Beatrice, (she actually dies, though the fact of death is of no great importance) and the vision is, as it were, withdrawn; or, more accurately that which inspired the vision is withdrawn. The question which follows is not 'Why did Beatrice die?', but 'What is Dante to do in this unbearable situation?'. And, in The Death of Good Fortune, what is the Lover, and, by extension, what are the Old Woman and the King to do now that the hope of happiness has been taken away? The King counsels

a sober and stoical resignation.

> If indeed Good Fortune is now dead,
> our god, our only hope, behoves all
> to put away our loves, and what may fall
> take nobly, to make a nucleus of hearts
> resigned with one mind against Fate
> to share what we have, and in the natural honour brave
> all else. Resign yourselves: be strong.[1]

To the Lover this advice of 'making the best of things', and couched in these terms is repugnant; it seems to deny the reality of his experience of love and the validity of his 'vision'. He fights to discover a way out of the dilemma.

> ... it is all untrue,
> this content, this resignation: love must live,
> and if a woman coils up in another's heart
> and spoils love's accidents, love's substance must gather head.
> I do not see how, but somehow: love must live.[2]

Williams suggests, in these few lines, a solution to the problem which, strangely enough, he does not develop in the rest of the play. An apparently inexplicable distinction between the 'substance' and 'accidents' of love is drawn. It is seen as an absolute quality or value which assumes 'accidental' form in the person of the beloved. It is to the 'substance' of love that the lover submits, not to the 'accidents', the beloved - though normally they are not perceived in separation. But the argument is that the withdrawal or destruction of the 'accidents' does not necessarily involve the dissolution of the 'substance' - the means by which its reality has been conveyed has disappeared only. As Williams

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1 Ibid., p.188.

2 Ibid., p.189.

makes clear in his Arthurian poems, Love does not exist for the sake of the Lover, the Lover exists as a vehicle for Love. This same problem, and a similar solution is proposed and analysed in the prose of The Figure of Beatrice.

> The Beatricean quality has disappeared. But those things which have been said and done in the light of that quality remain; vows, if they have been serious vows, remain. If under the influence of the centre where Love is, we have wished to be at the centre with Love, then we have to get to the centre.[1]

The serious vows, according to Williams (and to Dante), are vows made not to the beloved so much as to the power of which she is the 'accidental' mediator. The analogy, however, in this quotation is not the philosophical one of 'substance' and 'accidents', but Dante's own mathematical image of the circle and its centre. In the twelfth section of The New Life Love describes himself as 'the centre of a circle, from which all parts of the circumference are equally distant ....'[2] Williams's argument is that any vision of love, however transitory, if taken with full seriousness, is as valid as any other. The more removal of the object on the circumference does not alter the fact that the individual has already turned his face, his hopes and his desires towards the centre where Love himself stands holding each point on the circumference in position.[3]

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1 p.36.

2 The New Life, Section XII. (Penguin Translation 1964), p.51.

3 The influence of Dante is apparent in another place too. As Mary resuscitates the figure of Good Fortune he cries out that Christ '... has taken my heart from my side, and is twisting it in his hands'
The scene is a reminder (perhaps an imitation) of the vision in The New Life in which the 'lord of terrible aspect' - Love - takes Dante's heart and compels the sleeping woman to eat it.

The Death of Good Fortune closes in a singularly unsatisfactory way, and we are fobbed off with a purely formal solution to the Lover's dilemma. It is impossible to believe that even an allegorical figure could be persuaded of the resolution of his problem by the mere enunciation of the phrase 'All luck is good'. And yet this is precisely what happens. But, as in so much of the poetry, one feels that Williams intended far more than he was able to express, or, possibly, took the trouble to express. So, in the context of the play alone we remain unconvinced by the dictum and unmoved by the Lover's acceptance of his situation. But, in the context of the whole of Williams's work the phrase does take on real significance. Echoing far in the background is the passage from the first novel, Shadows of Ecstasy, when the motif of suffering is first introduced.

> I tried to persuade him to live from the depth of his wound rather than to pine away in the pain of it; to make the extent of his desolation the extent of his kingdom.[1]

And undergirding the dictum is the whole of He Came Down from Heaven - his theology of the Fall and Redemption.

Superficially perhaps these two statements from the novel and the play seem to bear very little relation to the Christian faith. But although there is no overt reference to religion, they are both manifestations of Williams's deep understanding and sure grasp of a belief which is unique to Christianity - the transformation of every aspect of

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1 p.23.

life from within. As he says elsewhere 'nothing is to be forgotten'. Every experience, even the 'Troilus experience' is to be known, from within, as good. All ways are ways to God. The loss of vision, the loss of security, the loss of peace, the loss of life itself, are capable of being transmuted by the way in which they are known. In constantly returning to this theme Williams, in fact, is drawing out new implications of one of the profoundest insights of the Fourth Gospel. At the heart of St. John's vision we find the transformation of the horror of death on the Cross into a pattern of unsurpassed glory. The Cross itself is seen as the perfection of God's purpose in the Incarnation.[1] Sir Edwyn Hoskyns commenting on the opening of the thirteenth chapter of the gospel makes this point with the utmost force and economy.

> The Father who has been glorified on earth in the life of the Son is to be particularly and supremely glorified in His death .... It is this, and not any assurance of future vindication or reward, that makes the Death no scandal but the supreme manifestation of glory, and the purposeful departure of the traitor - <u>That thou doest, do quickly</u> - the occasion of triumphant assurance.[2]

In the only place where Williams talks directly about the Fourth Gospel and its theology[3] no mention is made of this aspect of St. John's thought (but the article is a review, and Williams seems to be properly limiting himself to the issues that are germane to the authors' intentions), but

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1 <u>The Gospel according to St. John</u>, Chs.12 (vv.23-33) & 17 (v.1 ff.)

2 <u>The Fourth Gospel</u> (First published 1940) Revised edition 1947, pp.449-450.

3 The essay entitled 'St. John' in <u>The Image of the City</u>, a <u>Time and Tide</u> review of <u>Christianity According to St. John</u> by W.F. Howard, and <u>The Christian Failure</u> by Charles Singer, 1943.

it can hardly be doubted that the special insights of the Johannine approach to the life and death of Christ had somehow permeated the thought and belief of Williams. 'Evil', as was said in He Came Down from Heaven, can be known in Christ as good. There is, therefore, in terms of the play, no such thing as good luck - all luck is good.

The Descent of the Dove.

Williams's sub-title to the book reads: 'A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church'; a simple enough statement on the surface, but his interpretation of the term 'history' as demonstrated in The Descent of the Dove is idiosyncratic. This is not to imply that it is invalid, but it tends to make the book a confusing one because the reader is never quite sure, nor does Williams always make it plain, exactly what his purpose is. In some respects this work is similar to the biographies. If the reader is seeking information he will find only the bare minimum of 'factual reportage' in these books. There is no suggestion that Williams was not possessed of the facts, but the cataloguing of them is not his interest and the works take their shape according to the dictates of certain ruling ideas. In the biographies one is conscious of his attempt to discover the essence of the subject's psychological and emotional life, and in the history his attention is focussed on the spiritual and theological meaning within, or behind, the observable sequence of events. The presupposition of The Descent of the Dove is that the historical process follows a discernible pattern - even if all the parts are not immediately identifiable - and that a divine purpose

informs the movement of the whole sequence. The book is as much a treatise on Providence as it is a history. All events are interpreted and evaluated in terms of certain theological maxims; a principle of composition Williams announces with a flourish in the Preface.

> "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou". As a maxim for living it is invaluable, and it - or its reversal - summarizes the history of the Christian Church.[1]

It is in the Preface too that he draws attention to the connection between The Descent of the Dove and those works of prose and poetry which immediately preceded its publication: Descent Into Hell, Taliessin Through Logres, and He Came Down from Heaven. We therefore expect the ruling ideas of those books to be presented and discussed again in The Descent of the Dove, and the present intention is the investigation of the degree to which Williams succeeds in communicating his distinctive theological insights by yet another literary means - a history.

The undergirding principle of the whole work is the principle of Co-inherence. The book is dedicated to 'The Companions of the Co-inherence', and the frontispiece is a reproduction of Lodovico Brea's Paradise, a painting taken by the author to demonstrate the co-inherence of 'the whole redeemed City'.[2] It could be said, with justification, that The Descent of the Dove is a historical survey in which the significance of every event is judged according to the extent to which it provides evidence for the vision of the ultimate co-inherence of man and

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1 p.viii.

2 p.vii.

the universe with God and demonstrates the actuality of the principles of exchange and substitution. It must be remembered that in He Came Down from Heaven Williams asserts categorically that Christianity was not responsible for the co-herence of all things; that inter-dependence is an inescapable fact of creation. But in Christendom man finds the redemption and transformation to a heavenly glory of that pattern of creation. The Descent of the Dove is an account of the historical operation of that redemption.

He begins precisely where one would expect a historian to begin - with the earliest documentary evidence of the Christian community, the letters of Paul. Williams sees the apostle as a great exponent of the doctrine of co-inherence, though he makes no attempt to examine the variety of ways in which Paul developed the doctrine. It will be remembered that the precept from the epistle to the Galatians 'Bear ye one another's burdens' was used as a kind of proof-text for the practice of 'substituted love' in both Descent Into Hell and He Came Down from Heaven. A similar procedure is followed here; phrases from the letters are quoted and interspersed with only the tersest of comments.

> In such words there was defined the new state of being, a state of redemption, of co-inherence, made by that divine substitution, "He in us and we in Him".[1]

It cannot be denied that Williams's deliberate brevity throughout The Descent of the Dove proves, on occasions, to be self-defeating. Not all the great phrases speak for themselves, and even those quoted from

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1 pp.9-10.

the letters of Paul are left 'hanging in the air'. Frequently the reader's expectation is disappointed by this lack of commentary. Williams's treatment is not superficial but it is often opaque, and it is not merely obtuseness on the part of the reader that causes him to wonder about the exact content of the phrases which seem pregnant with significance.

The principle of co-inherence is carried into the examination of that pervasive movement of the early years of Christendom known as Gnosticism. For Williams the Gnostics' inability to see the universe as a co-inherent entity is a failure to deal adequately with the real nature of human life, and, conversely, the Church's ultimate rejection of Gnostic theories in the definitions of her councils represents the preservation of the vision of creation's interdependent nature; the recognition of what simply is the case. It cannot be said that he found the plain idea of Gnosis; mysteries and initiations (one remembers his membership of the Order of the Golden Dawn) completely abhorrent. Nor, as the discussion of the novel The Place of the Lion should have made clear, were Gnostic conceptions of 'emanations' and effulgences'; graded orders of existence proceeding from a supreme and ineffable Source and stretching in their myriad hierarchies between heaven and earth, entirely foreign to his cast of mind,[1] Consequently, his discussion of these aspects of the movement, though mainly factual, is slightly ambiguous in

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Cf. Gnosticism. An Anthology, Ed. R.M. Grant. Esp. Chs. IV & V, for a description of these systems of belief.

tone. But he was bitterly opposed to the inherent dualism of all Gnostic systems. Irenaeus (c.160) pinpoints the dualism of Marcion's thought.

> And then he says that salvation will be of our souls only, of those souls which have learned his teaching; the body, because forsooth it is taken from the earth, cannot partake in salvation.[1]

Nothing could be further removed from the sensibility of one who believed in the authority of the romantic vision, the power of human love and the redemption of 'la carne gloriosa santa', and who saw the physical world as an image of heavenly glory, than a system like Gnosticism which, whatever its form - and there were many varieties[2] - divided soul from body, and spirit from matter, which regarded the material world as evil and which either debased the flesh in licentiousness or attempted to be rid of its demands by wild and perverse austerities.

> The stones they offered fitted the corners of many temples; only not of the City of Christendom .... The soul and the body (so to divide them formally) were not responsible for each other. Men were not responsible for each other. The Gordian knot of unity was cut, and the bits fell radically apart. Toothache, cancer,

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1 Adv. haer, I, xxvii, 2-3. Quoted in Documents of the Christian Church. Selected and edited by H. Bettenson. Second edition. O.U.P. Paperback, 1967, p.37.

2 Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines.

> To speak of Gnosticism as a movement is misleading for that term suggests a concrete organization or church. There were, as we have seen, plenty of Gnostic teachers, each with his coterie of adherents, but there was no single Gnostic Church. On the other hand, it is clear that behind all the variegated Gnostic sects there lay a common stock of ideas which could fasten upon, adapt themselves to and eventually transform any religious movement concerned to find an answer to the problems of existence, evil and salvation.
>
> (pp.25-26)

> women's periods, frustrated sex-love, these and other ills were without relation to the activity of the heavenly spheres.[1]

And as Williams demonstrates in the later essay, The Index of the Body (published in 1942), and as we have already seen in his beliefs on the Incarnation, it is his profound conviction - and one which he tends to identify with the doctrine of Christendom - that the physical occurrences of human life are intimately connected with the 'activity of the heavenly spheres'.

In the second chapter the originality of Williams's interpretation and reconstruction of Christendom's history becomes apparent. Amidst the brief survey of the personalities and events of the second and third centuries - personalities which included Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Polycarp, and events which included some of the most spectacular martyrdoms as well as the writing of documents counted among the classics of sacred literature - attention is focussed on the relatively unknown figure of an African slave-girl imprisoned for her profession of the Christian faith in Carthage - Felicitas. She has no feast-day of her own in the Calendar of the Western Church, but is remembered with her mistress Perpetua, whose diary of personal sufferings (possibly edited by Tertullian) has been preserved. Yet Williams sees her suffering and

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p.26.
Cf. R.A. Norris, God and the World in Early Christian Theology. (London, 1966).

> The Gnostic tended to think of matter as a positive principle of evil and error. He could conceive of no natural relation between matter and spirit save that of mutual exclusion ... his world ... consisted of distinct and contrary substances which should, ideally, be totally segregated from each other. The fact that matter exists and that matter, soul, and spirit are somehow "mixed" in the visible world-order are carefully explained as the result of two cosmic faux pas. (p.63)

death as one of the most significant events in the history of the Church, not because she showed particular nobility or graciousness in her acceptance of pain and death, but because her single utterance 'Another will be in me who will suffer for me as I shall suffer for him' epitomises what is meant by Christian co-inherence, and reaches more deeply into the mystery of creation and redemption than millions of words uttered by thousands of others. She is discussed in the company of one of the great teachers of the early Church, Clement of Alexandria.

> The two African cities proclaimed the universal web of exchange, and if the slave-girl's cry is more piercing than the philosopher's doctrine, yet it was to Clement that we owe the beginning of that philosophical thought which hinders, if it cannot by itself prevent, apostasy.[1]

The retort of Felicitas to the mocking inquiries of her gaolers embraces both the mystical sense of co-inherence: personal union and exchange with Christ, and that 'corporate' sense felt by so many martyrs in the early Church which led them to the conviction of the atoning value and reconciling power of their own sufferings and deaths in the lives of others.[2]

Ignatius of Antioch (c.35 - 107 A.D.) was one such martyr, and Williams clearly regards his death as significant an event as that of

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1 p.37.

2 Cf. H.E.W. Turner, The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption (London, 1952), pp.29-30.

Felicitas, but his method of handling it is a little confusing. Having introduced the great sayings of Felicitas and Anthony ('Your life and death are with your neighbour') somewhat portentously, he then claims that the greatest of all the epigrams of the Christian Church is to be found in 'a more ambiguous phrase', and quotes Ignatius's exclamation 'My Eros is crucified' (ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρως ἐσταύρωται) from the bishop's letter to the Romans.[1] Williams's elucidation of the epigram proves to be almost as ambiguous as the cry itself and he concludes his short discussion in the following cryptic way:

> "My" Eros is crucified; incredible as yet, the great doctrines of interchange, of the City, approached. "Another is in me"; "your life and death are in your neighbour"; "they in Me and I in them".[2]

Obviously he reads Ignatius's utterances as a 'saying of co-inherence', but the ensuing paragraphs fail to make clear the exact nature of the co-inherence that is being envisaged. Williams's confusion is not entirely surprising. The famous adage has been the subject of controversy among many patristic scholars. J.B. Lightfoot in his edition of the Apostolic Fathers (2 vols. 1885) translates the relevant sentence: 'My lust is crucified, and there is no fire of material longing

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'For though I am alive at the writing this, yet my desire is to die. My love is crucified; (and the fire that is within me does not desire any water; but being alive and springing with me, says), Come to the Father."
The Epistle to the Romans, Par. VII. The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. II, Trans. by W. Burton in the Ancient and Modern Library of Theological Literature. Undated.

2

The Descent of the Dove, p.46.

in me', and invites the reader, in his commentary on the passage, to make the comparison between Ignatius and Paul: between ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρως 'my earthly passion' and τὴν σάρκα ἐσταύρωσαν σὺν τοῖς παθήμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις. (Gal. v.24).[1] Burton, as we have seen, adopts a neutral approach to the word Eros. Origen, in his rendition of the phrase used the Latin word amor and is severely rebuked by Lightfoot for his interpretation.

> The word ἔρως, so frequent in classical Greek, is found only twice in the LXX and in both passages it denotes strong sensual passion, as a term of reproach; .... In the New Testament it does not occur at all .... Ignatius therefore would necessarily use ἔρως in a bad sense to denote the passions of his former unregenerate life. His ἀγάπη we might say, was perfected, when his ἔρως was crucified.
>
> His meaning therefore being clear, it is strange that Origen should have given a wholly different interpretation to the words.[2]

C. Bigg, in his Bampton lectures for 1886, takes exception to Lightfoot's strictures and, in a spirited defence of Origen's interpretation, points to the meaning of the word ἔρως in both Platonic and Neo-Platonic writings and to a 'confusion' of the concepts of ἔρως and ἀγάπη in philosophical circles by the time of the Early Church Fathers as well as to a certain fluidity in the whole question of the relation between human and divine love. Bigg positively rejects the notion of a possible correspondence with the thought of Paul.

> Like our 'love', of which it [ἔρως] is almost an exact equivalent, it may be applied to base uses, but it is not, like ἐπιθυμία, a base word. From the time of Parmenides it had been capable of the most exalted signification; ....[3]

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1 Cf. R. Bultmann, Ignatius & Paul (contained in Existence and Faith, Shorter writings of Rudolf Bultmann, London, 1961) for a discussion on the similarity and differences of Paul's and Ignatius's concepts of 'flesh' and 'spirit'.

2 Apostolic Fathers, Vol. II, Sect. ii. Ed. and trans. J.B. Lightfoot (1885), pp.222-223.

3 C. Bigg, The Christian Platonists of Alexandria (1886) Preface, p.x.

Having made this point, he goes on to make a second one - perhaps, as he says, more trivial, but one which is more germane to the present discussion. He argues an apostrophic content in Ignatius's cry. Eros takes on the meaning of 'the Beloved', Christ.

> What is Ignatius saying? .... Why is he in love with death? Because Christ, his Beloved, is crucified, and perfect union with Him will be attained by death .... If we translate as proposed by Dr. Zahn and the Bishop of Durham, we not only do great violence to the word ἔρως , but lose an impassioned phrase quite in harmony with the general colour of this highly figurative and enthusiastic passage.[1]

'Love' (Eros) as an apostrophe for Christ is a substantial element in Williams's own interpretation of the epigram, but he goes further than Bigg in stressing the intimacy of the union between Christ and the individual suggested in Ignatius's cry. Whereas Bigg sees Ignatius attaining 'perfect union' with Christ in his own death, Williams suggests that perfect union has already been attained in the flesh-taking of the Son of God and is only ratified by his martyrdom. Ignatius (and if for Ignatius, then for the whole of mankind) has already suffered and died in and with Christ in His passion and crucifixion. It is as though the epigram presents us with a paraphrase of Paul's utterance in his epistle to the Galatians, 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, Christ liveth in me'. (Gal. ii, 20). The Incarnation has made every soul present in every action of Jesus. For Williams the cry demonstrates the martyr's perception of this ultimate co-inherence of Christ and the individual, of God and man.

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1 Ibid., p.xi.

> He who is Theos is Anthropos, and all the images of anthropos are in him.[1]

At the same time he is concerned to emphasise that Eros is a matter of the body as well as the spirit and is not prepared to surrender the connotations of passionate longing and intense physical desire which had been part of the original meaning of the word. The love and desire of humans for each other is seen to be linked to, or rather seen to be part of, and an image of, the love and desire of humans for God. So Williams reads into the utterance the idea of union with God apprehended by the passionate vision of romantic love. Ignatius becomes a Dante of the second century.

> The Eros of five hundred years of Greece and Rome was to live after a new style; unexpected as yet, the Great Romantic vision approached.[2]

Curiously enough, at the beginning of his discussion of the Athanasian Creed ('the great humanist Ode') a few pages later Williams introduces what might be called a negative approach, indeed a contradictory interpretation of the ambiguous Ignatian utterance. And, perversely, he sees this second interpretation as complimentary and not contradictory, and 'My Eros is crucified' thus becomes a statement of co-inherence precisely because of its ambiguity; it is seen to embrace both the classical ways of union with God: the Via Affirmativa and the Via Negativa. His cleverness has the air of a conjuring trick, but what is

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1 The Descent of the Dove, p.46.

2 Ibid., p.46.

of importance is the fact that he insists on both ways being necessary in the Christian life, and recognises their dependence on one another.

> No Affirmation could be so complete as not to need definition, discipline, and refusal; no Rejection so absolute as not to leave necessary (literally and metaphorically) beans, and a wild beast's skin and a little water.[1]

The aphorism of the Preface 'This also is Thou; neither is this Thou' perfectly describes the interdependence of the two ways, and hence itself becomes an epigram of co-inherence.

When Williams reaches Augustine he finds the writings of the North African bishop bursting with evidence of his belief in the principle of co-inherence. From the many strands of Augustine's thought Williams separates one which he regards as a particularly fine example of the theologian's attitude. It is one which has troubled many commentators on Augustine's work - the involvement of all humanity in the sin and guilt of Adam by their physical, seminal presence in his loins, and it is possible that Williams's interpretation of Adamic identification misrepresents the mind of the fifth century bishop. It would seem (and the exposition of Original Sin in He Came Down from Heaven would support this supposition) that he rejects the idea of the existence of the historical figure Adam together with the Traducianism which Augustine inherited from an earlier teacher in the African Church, Tertullian.[2]

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1 Ibid., pp.57-58.

2 Cf. Williams's footnote on the hundred and twenty-fourth page of The Forgiveness of Sins in which a pre-natal existence is specifically denied.

But the rejection is not stated in so many words, for the writing hovers between paraphrase and commentary. What is clear is Williams's intention to stress the belief that men live in each other and are involved in the sin and guilt of each other's lives, and that no better way of describing this web of misery and responsibility can be found than the image of Adam and the Fall. And if he sees Augustine's 'Fuimus ille unus' as an <u>image</u> of co-inherence, it is an image of extraordinary potency, and Williams's own elaboration verges on the literal: a description of physical union.

> Whatever ages of time lay between us and Adam, yet we were in him and we were he; more, we sinned in him and his guilt is in us .... Exchange, substitution, co-inherence are a natural fact as well as a supernatural truth.[1]

And so the process of seeking out the historical expressions of the 'natural fact' and the 'supernatural truth' continues, and there is no need for a close examination of every instance Williams brings to the reader's notice. The rule of St. Benedict and the creation of the communal monastic life demonstrates the principle after its own manner. The Great Schism of the eleventh century between Eastern and Western Christendom is cited as violation of the co-inherence of the Church, and the twelfth century Manicheeism of Languedoc, as well as the nineteenth century Christian Science of Mary Baker Eddy[2], as a violation of the personal, human co-inherence of flesh and spirit.

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1 <u>The Descent of the Dove</u>, p.69.

2 Ibid., p.113.

But one instance - the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist - needs to be singled out because it seems to epitomise for Williams the concrete operation of the principle. It is pertinent at this point to draw attention to the place that the Eucharist and the Holy Communion occupied in the Williams's own life. Its wonder is a recurring theme of the early poetry and his choice of the Holy Grail as one of the dominant motifs of the Arthurian cycles constantly draws the reader towards a contemplation of one of the central mysteries of the Christian Church. Alice Hadfield recalls his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament in her biography, and also his unwillingness to plunge too deeply into a theological investigation of the means by which Christ may be said to be present in the Sacrament.

> He went every Sunday to the Eucharist. It was the centre of his thought and so of his life. He never tired of meditating on it. 'I think the Sacrament is more than images; how, and after what mode is another matter. I think the elements are drawn into him at the moment of the flesh-death-resurrection. The method of the union is obscure enough, and I'm a little inclined to agree that if there is nothing but He there, there is hardly a sacrament .... I will genuflect and adore the Presence, because it seems to me consistent with the general movement that he should so have withdrawn creation into him. On the other hand I am shy of the arguments; the Rite which culminates in an adorable Mystery of co-inherence will serve for me.'[1]

As he points out in The Descent of the Dove, the mysteries of the co-inherent Godhead had been, as far as possible, dogmatically defined in the Trinitarian formulae of Nicaea, and the mysteries of the co-inherent

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1 Hadfield, p.181.

Godhead and Manhood in the Christological clauses of Chalcedon, but the extension of those mysteries i.e. the continuing presence of Christ in the rites of the Church had been 'accepted rather than discussed' for the first eleven hundred years of the Church's history, and certainly not defined. The decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council called by Innocent III in 1215, with their use of the category of 'Transubstantiation' was a decided advance in the direction of definition, and the ritual of Western Christendom was enriched in 1264 by the creation of a new festival in honour of the Holy Sacrament, Corpus Christi. True to his inherited Anglican tradition Williams does not espouse the definitions of the Church of Rome, nor any other dogmatic formulation of the presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, but he is prepared to recognise in the Medieval doctrine of Transubstantiation and the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi a courageous attempt at understanding and displaying the reality of the Presence existing within and transforming, however mysteriously, the elements of bread and wine.

> The co-inherence of matter and Deity as a presence became as liturgically glorious as it was intellectually splendid, and the performance of the dramatic Mysteries and Miracles celebrated in many places through a long summer's day the Act in the present sacrament as well as in history and in the soul.[1]

Despite the fact of his unwillingness to enter into a theological investigation of the nature of the Real Presence Williams nonetheless leaves us in no doubt that he regarded the Holy Eucharist as a rite which accomplished far more than the mere commemoration of an event (either the

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1 The Descent of the Dove, p.119

Last Supper or the Crucifixion), and the consecrated elements of bread and wine as much more than material symbols of the individual Christian's spiritual union with his Lord. He chooses to describe the mystery of the Eucharistic presence in terms of 'image' and 'co-inherence'. And his use of the word 'image' in this context is, of course, similar to his use of it in other places. The image, at one and the same time, points away from itself to the reality, and contains, in its own distinctive way, the reality itself.

The last hundred years of the Church's life has seen the growth and flowering of a renewed interest in the theology of the sacraments - especially the Eucharistic sacrament - in the Reformed traditions as well as the Catholic. It is sad that Williams's writing on the Eucharist is so brief and sparse, for I believe that had he addressed himself to a systematic exposition of the problems his place in the development of Western Eucharistic theology would have been as important as that of de la Taille, Spens, or the Abbot Anskar Vonier whose approach Williams's few suggestive remarks in some measure resembles.[1] Vonier's key-word is 'sign', and his use of it is closely allied to Williams's use of the word 'image'. For Vonier the Eucharist is the kind of sign which effects what it signifies, viz. the presence of Christ in a real and special kind of way.

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1 For a brief examination of recent developments in Eucharistic theology see E.L. Mascall, Corpus Christi (London, 1953).

> Signification and causation of the spiritual thing, of the mystery of faith, are indissolubly united in the Christian sacrament .... The sacrament must be cause in such wise as actually to represent the past, the present, and the future; and it must be a sign in such wise as actually to effect the thing which it proclaims.[1]

Williams's comments are less clear and precise than Vonier's, but the similarity can be seen. The sacrament is the image of Christ, His representation, and also the means by which He makes Himself known and communicates His very life to the worshipper. Christ and creation come together in this sacrament; the life of God and the life of man co-inhere in this point of time. Some notion of co-inherence is also to be found in Vonier. Commenting on a passage from the Summa Theologica (S.T. III, Question lx, Article 3) he says

> Every sacrament then has something to declare: it recalls the past, it is the voice of the present, it reveals the future .... It can embrace heaven and earth, time and eternity, because it is a sign; were it only a grace it would be no more than the gift of the present hour; but being a sign the whole history of the spiritual world is reflected on it.[2]

Williams would unhesitatingly have endorsed such an approach, but might, I think, have been slightly unhappy with the word 'reflected', and would have preferred one which went beyond the idea of a mirror to suggest that the 'whole history of the spiritual world' could somehow be seen to be contained and conveyed in it. The sacrament is the locus of co-inherence.

It is important to notice, in the words recorded by Alice Hadfield, the stress placed on the notion of the elements being 'taken into Christ'

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1 A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist. The Collected Works of Abbot Vonier, Vol. II, pp.243-244 (London, 1952).

2 Ibid., p.238.

rather than the idea of Christ becoming present in the elements. Williams's emphasis is different from that of the developed doctrine of Transubstantiation, but entirely congruous with the general train of his thought and is part of that unified religious sensibility which places such value on the Incarnational clause of the Athanasian Creed, 'One not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God.' The movement of his thought might be described as consistently anagogic: it is a way of seeing the life of man and, indeed the whole of the created order, flowing surely and steadily into the life of God.

It is strange to observe, in this context, that when Williams embarks on his discussion of the Divine Comedy in the sixth chapter, he does not draw attention to the similarity between the triumphal procession which Dante witnesses at the top of the mountain Purgatory and the processions of the Blessed Sacrament which, since the inception of the Feast of Corpus Christi, were becoming a regular feature of the life of the Italian city. That there is a close connection between the themes of Dante's poetry and the upsurge of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament can be seen clearly enough, but Williams leaves the examination of this connection to The Figure of Beatrice, and in The Descent of the Dove focusses his attention on the poet in another role - as the greatest representative of the Way of Affirmation; a theological principle embodied in the first half of that aphorism he places epigraphically at the beginning of the book.

Inevitably the discussion revolves around the question of romantic

love, and Williams is surely correct in his presentation of Dante, who, admittedly, never uses the term 'romantic love', as one who saw in the experience of the lover the most easily discernible example of that way of salvation and illumination known as the Way of Affirmation. Williams remarks 'it was the face of the girl in Florence which first startled him into looking' into the mystery of the Divine life, and the reader finds himself in the familiar territory of an exposition of the doctrine of Images. Substantial and real as they are, the girl Beatrice and the emotional upheaval of the experience of love are not self-sufficient; they have a function to perform in Dante's life; they startle him into a new awareness of God. The physical Beatrice points to the Divine source of her being and Dante's experience of falling in love is the earnest of that life of heaven where 'the exquisite paradox of human love at its finest is true of the very nature of life itself'. Williams, like Dante, is at pains to point out the insidious dangers of this way of affirmation. To affirm the love experience is to take a great risk: intellectual effort is required to distinguish between true and false trails, and the greatest danger of all is that into which Dante's Paolo and Francesca fall - the indulgence of the experience i.e. the indulgence of the image, for its own sake and the failure to perceive its function in pointing the way to God. Love is the master of the lover and not his slave or possession. The lover has a function to perform; he exists to love, as the beautiful exists to function for Beauty and the artist for Art. There is a reminder here, as Williams quotes from the writings

of Erigena,[1] of the portrayal of the archetypal principles in the novel The Place of the Lion. Sin can be read in terms of the betrayal of the function by 'the commanded essence'. Behind all such arguments lies a quasi-Platonic concept of universals in which individual acts of love have their being by participation in the archetype. And Williams, repeating Dante's modification of the principles of philosophical Realism which undergird the theology of Thomas Aquinas, points to an important aspect of Dante's apprehension of the Affirmative Way.

> ... "the essence is created for the sake of the function and not the function for the essence". The soul, that is, exists to know God, but not God to be known by the soul, and so throughout. The whole work of Dante is an exhibition of a process - the process of the preparation of the essence for its function .... It is a process according to the Affirmative Way ...._2

Speaking of the way in which Williams develops the principal themes of his later works, Alice Hadfield states that all his thought 'goes back to the Trinity and the Incarnation and the Crucifixion of Christ'.[3] Some justification for the assertion can be found in the fact that Williams begins the section on Dante in The Descent of the Dove by making it plain that his own theology of romantic love which could easily have been little more than the exaltation of an erotic experience, is intimately bound up with his interpretation of the Incarnation. Because of the perfect exchange found in the life of Jesus Christ - the 'place'

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1 The Descent of the Dove, p.131.

2 Ibid., p.132.

3 Hadfield, p.136.

of ultimate co-inherence of man and God — the flesh becomes capable of bearing the weight of divine glory and shining with a heavenly splendour: individual lives become the means by which the Divine life is perceived and begun to be enjoyed.[1] It is clear from the poetic imagery of both the New Life and The Divine Comedy that Dante intended the figure of Beatrice to operate as a type or symbol of Christ; an aspect of his poetry which seems to have shocked and surprised many of his commentators. Williams is quick to seize on this intention and emphasise its importance. 'In the vision of romantic love the Holy Spirit has deigned to reveal, as it were, the Christ-hood of two individuals each to other' (p.131).

It is one of the most remarkable achievements of all his writing on the subject of Images that it manages to hold the image and the reality in perfect balance. Although one is, so to speak, conducted through the image to the reality of which it is the concrete expression, the image itself is never destroyed or allowed to lose its value and importance. Williams convinces one that the lover does not love his beloved less when he sees her as an image of God and proceeds to love Christ in her. The

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1 From time to time Williams is ambiguous in his use of the terms 'natural' and 'supernatural'. This section is one such occasion. In the following statement about reconciliation, for example, is the contrast between natural and supernatural to be seen as a contrast between matter and spirit, between human life and Divine life, between two kinds of experience?

> But this is possible only because of the Incarnation, because "matter is capable of salvation," because the anthropos is united with the theos, and because the natural and the supernatural are one Christ.

integrity of the image remains utterly unimpaired. Dante, of course, demonstrates even more forcibly the same perfect balance. It was Beatrice, the girl in Florence, whom he passionately adored, and yet it was Beatrice as a vehicle of God's glory that was ultimately important, and Christ-in-Beatrice who was the goal of his hopes and desires.

Williams sees the principle of co-inherence enunciated in the utterances of Ignatius and Felicitas. He has his own way of expressing it: in the image of the City - a word which appears with some frequency in The Descent of the Dove. Its use as a symbol of human inter-dependence and mutual exchange in the earlier works has already been mentioned. The most mature development of the idea is to be found in the essay The Redeemed City printed in The Dublin Review, October, 1941, but one feature of its use in this book is worth noticing. In the first chapter a distinction is drawn between the Kingdom, the Church, and the City.

> The first division between the Church and what has been called the Kingdom began to exist. The Kingdom - or, apocalyptically, the City - is the state into which Christendom is called; but except in vision, she is not yet the City. The City is the state which the Church is to become.[1]

The distinction between the Church and the City is not always as clear-cut as this in Williams's work, but even in those places where the image is vaguer, the note of eschatology accompanies the mention of the City. It is always, at its lowest level, a symbol of co-inherence. Mutual exchange is a natural fact of human existence and the city is seen as the

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1 p.15.

natural state of human living. The fact, however, is constantly being denied by sin and its resulting separation, so the City becomes an apocalyptic vision of perfect exchange. The Church is the instrument by which the saving and healing work of Christ is carried out and the whole pattern of the co-inherent life is redeemed. In effect, the City, for Williams, operates as a symbol of the Church triumphant. The City is thus, in some sense, always the Redeemed City.[1]

It is surprising, and disappointing, that in The Descent of the Dove no attempt is made at integrating the two motifs which are woven together in Dante's thought, and are dominant in Williams's own theology, viz. romantic love and the image of the city. Even when it comes to the close examination of Dante's works in The Figure of Beatrice Williams's exploration of the relation between the figure of the girl and the idea of Florence is less than satisfactory, though he is concerned to stress its importance for a true understanding of the Italian poet. The early poems lead us to expect that Williams would develop a concept of the love relationship as a city within a city, but no such development comes, though the suggestion remains implicit, and the question of the relation between the personal and the individual and the social and communal is left hanging in the air.

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Cf. The closing stanza of the poem Celestial Cities from the early volume Divorce (pp.30-32)

When our translated cities
Are joyous and divine,
And through the streets of London
The streets of Sarras shine,
When what is hid in London
Doth then in Sarras show.

Perhaps the most surprising, and certainly one of the most interesting aspects of The Descent of the Dove is the space Williams devotes to the nineteenth century philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. Almost as many pages are given to the exposition of his life and thought as are given to Dante's. Both Mary Shideler and Alice Hadfield talk of the importance of Kierkegaard in the development of Williams's own outlook, and it is not improbable that he could have been influenced by the Dane. The 'external evidence' taken by itself would lead us to suppose that this was the case. Apart from the disproportionately long passage in The Descent of the Dove, it must be remembered that it was Williams who espoused the cause of Kierkegaard in the nineteen-thirties, and by his efforts persuaded the Oxford University Press to publish the first English translation of Kierkegaard in 1936. And Alice Hadfield recalls a lecture he delivered at the City Literary Institute which she believes to have been the first public lecture in England on this philosopher.[1] Furthermore, Williams's anthology of spiritual 'epigrams' entitled The New Christian Year includes as many quotations from the works of Kierkegaard as it does from the works of Augustine and Dante. Nevertheless I find all attempts to draw parallels between the thought of Kierkegaard and that of Williams strained and false.

That Williams had immense admiration for the writings of Kierkegaard, and was excited and disturbed by them, is undeniable, but admiration and excitement do not, of themselves, constitute arguments for influence, and

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1 Hadfield, p.126.

the case for similarity comes to rest upon the connection between Kierkegaard's conception of 'Angst' and Williams's idea of 'the actual schism in reason' - the dark side of their vision of life. In a statement like the following from Mary Shideler's book The Theology of Romantic Love

> The negative romantic moment bears many names. Kierkegaard called it "angst" - dread, Tillich "the abyss", psychiatrists "anxiety", Williams "outrage".[1]

the identification of 'outrage' with 'angst' (and with 'the abyss', for that matter) is too easy and glib. There is a connection, but it is not one of identity. Alice Hadfield's biographical 'explanation' has a more authentic sound to it. She writes of Williams's growing awareness of pain and despair in the early nineteen thirties.

> It was then that he heard a new voice .... It spoke of faith and paradox and dread. It cried that God is love and therefore man lived in terror and anguish .... The voice was Soren Kierkegaard's.[2]

Obviously I can make no assertions about Williams's private beliefs, but from the religious sensibility that is revealed in the writings it is possible to conclude that what drew him to Kierkegaard was the latter's profoundly serious approach to the experience of personal suffering and his attempt to 'make sense' of it by the paradoxical assertion of the co-existence (almost the co-inherence) of despair and joy. Both men stress the necessity of entering into the experience of desolation and

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1 p.34.

2 Hadfield, p.125.

dread and transforming it from the inside. When, however, it comes to the detailed examination of man's condition of 'outrage' - separation from self, the world and God - and the proposed transcension of this condition totally different sensibilities are revealed. Kierkegaard and Williams are at one in their recognition of the condition, but poles apart in their delineation of it.

Kierkegaard's system, in so far as it can be called a system, is built up, in true Lutheran fashion, upon the basic categories of Sin, Guilt, Faith and Justification. It is true that he personalised these categories and rejected the theological treatment of them by the contemporary Church in Denmark, but they remain essential to the pattern of his thought. Walter Lowry's definitive biography, as well as Kierkegaard's own journals, make it clear that guilt, or rather a deep-seated personal sense of guilt, - whether derived from the terrifying experience of his childhood or from some other cause[1] - was a dominating factor of his life and thought. From this condition springs that asseveration which Williams in The Descent of the Dove quotes as one of Kierkegaard's key-phrases, 'before God all are in the wrong'.[2] Such a phrase, with Kierkegaard's meaning, could never have formed an integral part of Williams's own apprehension, precisely because it is understood in terms of guilt and justification. For all his talk about Justice,

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1 In early youth Soren was witness to a scene in which his father cursed God. It seems to have haunted and disturbed him throughout his life.

2 p.219.

the concept of Justification, in the Lutheran sense - and perhaps also in the Pauline sense - never appears, and he speaks of guilt only in terms of mutual responsibility, linking it, as we have seen, with the image of the Adam where the emphasis falls not upon the wrong-doing, but upon the involvement of every individual in the life and action of man's first parents.[1] Williams never looks for justification and righteousness, but for transfiguration and glory.

Furthermore, when it comes to the romantic experience, Williams takes his cue from Dante not from Kierkegaard. In fact, the whole curious affair of Regine Olsen, so important in the life and attitudes of Kierkegaard, is never mentioned by Williams. Dante is no stranger to pain and hopelessness in love but sees in Beatrice a means of approaching the reality and the glory of God. Kierkegaard, despite his feeling, sees in Regine a figure which would eventually 'undermine his courage, depress his resolve, and become the worst inner obstacle to the exercise of his strange vocation.'[2] For Dante, as Williams understands him, the very vocation is recognised because of the appearance of the girl in the streets of Florence. Add to this Williams's insistence on the power of Reason in plumbing the mysteries of God, his doctrine of Images, and his firm belief in the ultimate pattern, order and intelligibility of the

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1 Cf. The Forgiveness of Sins, p.124.

2 Denis de Rougemont analyses the love of Kierkegaard in some detail in The Myths of Love (published in England in 1963) Ch. III 'Two Danish Princes', pp.79-93.

universe, and it will be seen how different the two men were. The difference lies in a quality of thought and feeling - best described as 'sensibility'. They would almost certainly have agreed on the necessity of accepting the clauses of the Athanasian Creed but they would just as certainly have disagreed about their interpretation. Kierkegaard could probably have accepted and understood all that Williams had to say about the 'Troilus experience', but it is doubtful whether he could have understood and accepted Williams's profound satisfaction in the strange, unearthly serenity of Shakespeare's last plays, plays which, for Williams, had some of the quality of heaven.

> A little more, and all our human world would undergo that almost terrifying alchemy, our joys would be pearls, our griefs coral. The elemental simplicities of the last plays, the facts of being uttering their essential nature, alone remain.[1]

Witchcraft.

Williams's study in witchcraft is a difficult book to 'place'. Like He Came Down from Heaven and The Descent of the Dove and, as we shall see later, The Figure of Beatrice, it does not submit easily to classification. It is a pot-pourri of mythology, anthropology, theology, and history, and contains, as in nearly all of Williams's prose work, an admixture of slightly pretentious rhetoric. Yet it is a successful book, demonstrating not only his intellectual grasp of the subject, but a consistency of outlook which binds the diversity of the constituent

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1 The English Poetic Mind, pp.107 and 103.

elements into a comprehensible unity. It is a book which is very little read, even among those who profess more than a passing acquaintance with the work of Williams. This is a pity, as its breadth of knowledge, its scepticism, and its sheer commonsense judgments would give the lie to the belief, largely gathered from a superficial reading of his novels, that Williams was a man morbidly concerned with the supernatural manifestations of evil and suspiciously well-versed in the Black Arts. Perhaps his membership of the Order of the Golden Dawn has added fuel to the fire of this impression, but a statement from the Preface to Witchcraft puts the whole matter in its proper perspective and sets the tone for the rest of the book.

> No-one will derive any knowledge of initiation from this book; if he wishes to meet 'the tall black man' or to find the proper method of using the Reversed Pentagram, he must rely on his own heart, which will, no doubt be one way or other sufficient.[1]

The book then will provide no supernatural 'thrills' for the reader with a vulgar curiosity: it is principally an investigation into certain manifestations of sin and evil and not a handbook in technique. Though perfectly prepared to use the trappings of magical rites for purposes of suspense in the telling of a story, Williams regards them, basically, as trivial and a little ridiculous, and is uninterested in them for their own sake.

In 1943 he wrote to Alice Hadfield '... a darkness has always haunted me ....'[2] We have already been made aware of this 'haunting' in the

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1 p.9.

2 Hadfield, p.181.

early poetry, the novels, and the literary criticism; at one level Witchcraft can be read as yet another expression of this experience of darkness. It is, of course, an objective critical survey, but it has the distinctly personal tone of one who is trying to make some sense of an almost subconscious experience by means of a rational investigation of external phenomena. The following long quotation perfectly demonstrates this point and provides a further insight into the quality of Williams's sensibility. It occurs at the beginning of a discussion on the psychological origins of the practice of witchcraft.

> The predisposition towards the idea of magic might be said to begin with a moment which seems to be of fairly common experience - the moment when it seems that anything might turn into anything else. We have grown used - and properly used - to regarding this sensation as invalid because, on the whole, things do not turn into other things except by processes which we realise, or else so frequently that we appreciate the probability. But the occasional sensation remains. A room, a street, a field, becomes unsure. The edge of a possibility of utter alteration intrudes. A door untouched might close ... an animal might not be an animal; a man might not be a man. One may be with a friend, and a terror will take one even while his admirable voice is speaking; one will be with a lover and the hand will become a different and terrifying thing, ... All this may be due to racial memories or any other cause; the point is that it exists. It exists and can be communicated; it can even be shared. There is, in our human centre, a heart-gripping fear of irrational change, of perilous and malevolent change.
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> Secondly, there is the human body, and the movements of the human body. Even now, when as a general rule, the human body is not supposed to mean anything there are moments when it seems, in spite of ourselves, packed with significance. This sensation is almost exactly the opposite of the last. There one was aware that any phenomenon might alter into another and truer self. Here, one is aware that a phenomenon, being wholly itself, is laden with universal meaning. A hand lighting a cigarette is the explanation of everything; a foot stepping from a train is the rock of all existence. If the first group of sensations are due to racial fear, I do not know to what the second group are due unless to the Mercy of God .... But intellectually they are both

> as valid or invalid as each other ... and they justify each other, at least to this extent, that (though the first suggests irrationality and the second rationality) they both at first overthrow a simple truth that phenomena are what phenomena seem.[1]

Two of the most important themes which have been running through the earlier works are taken up in this passage and summarised. The first is the theme of 'outrage'; the experience of 'the actual schism in reason'. This is the hellish side of the coin of illusory phenomena. In early poems like Outland Travel and Domesticity the sudden realisation that 'phenomena are not what phenomena seem' is expressed crudely and sensationally in terms of a terror and malevolence lying behind the sights and sounds of everyday existence. Both The English Poetic Mind and Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind contain a more subtle and penetrating examination of this experience. Under the cover of literary analysis Williams outlines the 'Troilus experience' in which horror and pain are endured as the 'thing perceived' - in this case the beloved object - reveals itself in an utterly different and contradictory mode. That Williams sees these changes as possibly hellish is indicated by the fact that he uses the words 'irrational' and 'irrationality' to describe them. Throughout his work he never deviates from the conception of hell as the place, or rather the state, in which there is neither pattern nor order, and in which, because of the absence of reason, there is only meaninglessness and absurdity. In the introduction to the World's Classics edition of Milton's poems he uses

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1 pp.77-78.

the phrase 'Hell is always inaccurate' to describe Satan's rebellion and fall. It is a mild enough expression until one realises that for Williams, as the section on geometrical images in He Came Down from Heaven shows, accuracy and order are essential to reality.

This raises the important question of the reality of evil and Williams's attitude to it in Witchcraft. It has to be admitted that he is equivocal on the existence of Satan and the demonic forces. Essentially, I believe, his stand is consistent with that defined in He Came Down from Heaven. When hell is experienced it is a schism within reason that takes place. 'All difference consists in the mode of knowledge', and the experience of contradiction is an experience within the personality. This does not mean that the darkness and horror are unreal, but that they are the result, not of slavery to an external power, but of a contradiction that lies embedded in human nature. In the conclusion to the book he explains the cessation of the witch-hunts in England and comments with approval on the definition of evil provided by the Caroline Divine, William Law, that 'the darkness of hell is but the Divine Nature falsely invoked by the self',[1] and five pages later buttresses Law's definition with the remarks:

> Fully supernatural, it [the Church] denounced the hideous supernatural, and denounced it as an indulgence of the mind and of the fancy as much as of the act itself. In that sense as in all it instructed its members to 'think no evil'; do not imagine these things.[2]

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1 p.302.

2 p.307.

But he seems to be unhappy in the stance he has adopted; there seems to be a disjunction between his metaphysical conception of evil and the historical facts he is committed to describing. So he concludes the book with a statement that is faintly reminiscent of the description of evil and hell which appears in War in Heaven and Descent Into Hell. It would be convenient to dismiss the passage as rhetoric, but Williams's statements are clear enough to forbid such an easy way out. He deliberately leaves the reader with a paradox - in fact, a contradiction - and is unwilling, here, to resolve it.

> Underneath all the tales there does lie something different from the tales. How different? In this - that the thing which is invoked is a thing of a different nature, however it may put on a human appearance or in its servants their human appetites. It is cold, it is hungry, it is violent, it is illusory ... it wants 'souls', and yet it pines for matter. It never was, and yet it always is.
>
> Some such absurd contradiction is perhaps the nearest one can come to describing the impression left by the whole history .... Opinions have differed and will (humanly speaking) always differ about its reality.[1]

We come now to the second theme of the long passage previously quoted: the sensation which Williams identifies as almost 'exactly the opposite' of that which we have been discussing. The paragraph is, in reality, concerned with the doctrine of Images, and attempts to convey the nature of the experience which leads to a constructing of the doctrine. There are echoes here of early poems like Ecclesia Docens and The Continuing Doctrine in which the body of the beloved seems to possess and communicate moral truths, and those passages in Shadows of Ecstasy when Philip becomes

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1 pp.310-311.

aware that, in some strange way, the hand and arm of his beloved Rosamond are connected with the shape of the Downs and the movements of wind and water. The secrets of the universe seem to be contained in the physical being of the beloved. There is, however, an important difference between the feeling of the early poems and novels and the attitudes of Witchcraft. Whereas in Shadows of Ecstasy and The Continuing Doctrine the experience is limited to the romantic lover, here it is suggested that the experience is universal and that anybody can perform the function that the beloved's body more immediately and directly performs for the lover. The romantic vision still hovers behind the statements, but the idea is the same as that expressed in the play Seed of Adam when the Virgin Mary's hand is seen as 'the fact of God's compact of light' and Mary describes herself as 'only one diagram of the glory'.[1] The belief contained within this dense paragraph is that man is both part of, and the consummation of, the whole created order. He is intimately, physically, linked with the movements of that order and is also its microcosm so that the discovery of his beauty and purpose automatically entails the discovery of the meaning of the universe. But there is another strand of thought woven into this. He is seen also as the supreme image of God in the creation which, itself, is a lesser image of Him. This is where the concept of rationality has relevance. When the image is most intensely itself, it most vitally embodies the qualities of its source. When man embodies the nature of God he conveys the essentially rational quality of His being - the pattern and order; the Divine geometry of the life of the Trinity.

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1 The Seed of Adam, p.10 and p.12.

The Forgiveness of Sins.

The third book of the period under discussion (1938-1942) was published in 1942 and has, since its publication, been treated as a sequel to, and a development of, the earlier essay He Came Down from Heaven. This is quite proper, as it is, clearly, an attempt to work out in greater, practical detail some of the implications of the doctrine of the Atonement which had been outlined in the earlier book. Williams himself emphasises the connection between the two works by quoting extensively from He Came Down from Heaven in the third chapter.

Alice Hadfield remarks of The Forgiveness of Sins that it is the only one which is 'pure argument', and complains of its difficulty. 'There is much in it, but it is a tired book'.[1] In some ways her judgment is true: the writing lacks the energetic elegance of The Descent of the Dove and the exuberance of many of his short essays. There is a sense, also, in which the work can be called repetitive, not merely by reason of the fact of the direct quotation from He Came Down from Heaven but because many of the ideas and beliefs of the earlier works are reproduced entirely unchanged - even by their new context. The reader at these moments inevitably feels that this is ground which has been covered before, and therefore receives that impression of tiredness that Alice Hadfield speaks of. Once these faults have been recognised however, the virtues of the book stand out more clearly. It is more carefully constructed than anything else Williams produced, the rhetorical flourishes are cut down to a minimum, and there are occasional moments

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1 Hadfield, p.173.

when he probes more deeply and thoughtfully into the problems of the Christian life than he does anywhere else in his published work.

The Introduction announces the theme of the essay in a way that might be regarded as surprising in view of Williams's previous insistence on the primacy of love in the life of exchange.

> ... if forgiveness is part of the interchanged life of men, then we must know it in order to live to and among them. Forgiveness, if it is at all a principle of that interchanged life, is certainly the deepest of all; if it is not, then the whole principle of interchanged life is false.[1]

The meaning is quite unmistakeable, but the new emphasis on the cardinal importance of forgiveness does not, fundamentally represent a changed position in regard to the essential nature and place of love in the Divine Economy. The book may, as Alice Hadfield says, be 'pure argument', but it is not an abstract, theoretical argument, it is a work of moral theology in which Williams is concerned with the application of the high doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement at the mundane levels of dislocated and bewildering human existence. The questions before the author's mind are 'How can those beliefs (outlined in He Came Down from Heaven) change the lives of men and women?'; 'what does it mean to believe in the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Love?'. The conclusion is that forgiveness is part of, and, in one direction, the supreme operation of, love. The Incarnation of love is the practice of forgiveness. Forgiveness is the love of God operating towards creation and the love of

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1 p.103.

men operating within creation. Williams is enlarging his own, and our, conception of the way love works.

> ... not less of love but expanding
> Of love beyond desire, ... [1]

The love which is exchanged between the Persons of the Blessed Trinity has no need of this pattern of operation. That love should need to express itself in the mode of forgiveness implies the misery and falsity of life lived in the consequences of the Fall. And that forgiveness should be seen, not merely as an element in the life of love but as its primary mode of action indicates the seriousness of Williams's apprehension of Original Sin and its consequences. Not even romantic lovers escape the anguish and incoherence of the human condition, and a vital element of the romantic love-relationship is precisely the power which lies in the exercise of pardon. No human relationship can exist without the recognition of the necessity to forgive and be forgiven. This is a law of redeemed nature and the centrality of the plea for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer proclaims the fact.[2] The discussion of the lovers' need to forgive each other is contained in the second chapter; Williams's tender, witty, but, from the literary point of view, slightly off-centre, critical analysis of the theme of forgiveness in Shakespeare's plays. What is true in Shakespeare is true also of the Christian conception of the world, and Williams admits that Shakespeare's 'high realisation of pardon' in the final plays 'may have derived from the

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1 T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets. Little Gidding, Pt.III, ll.8-9.

2 The Forgiveness of Sins, p.157.

Christian religion'.[1] In one of his most felicitous and penetrating phrases Williams describes pardon as 'love renewing itself in a mutual and exchanged knowledge'. It occurs in the context of the Shakespearian discussion, but it becomes a kind of lynch-pin for the whole study.

Pardon is 'love renewing itself in a mutual and exchanged knowledge'. The operative word is knowledge, and if we are to reach the core of the meaning of this statement we must be aware of all that Williams has said about knowledge in He Came Down from Heaven. It will be remembered that in the chapter 'The Mystery of Pardon and the Paradox of Vanity' he discussed the relation between forgiveness and forgetting and reached the conclusion that a definition of pardon in terms of the 'putting-away' of the memory of sin was ultimately unacceptable; it misunderstood the nature of the Fall and the quality of God's love.[2] All things are to be known, nothing is to be forgotten or lost. As man had desired to know good in its contradictory mode - evil, so redemption means the knowledge of evil as good. There can be no restoration to a state of innocence, only the transformation of the existing state in which sin and its consequences are facts. These assertions are repeated in the chapters 'The Sin of Adam' and 'The Offering of Blood' in The Forgiveness of Sins. So the exercise of forgiveness cannot be the activity by which God chooses to treat men as though they had not rejected the source of their being, it is the activity by which this rejection is known and accepted

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1 p.117.

2 He Came Down from Heaven, p.39.

and ultimately transfigured into a new pattern of exchanged love.

The question remains: how is it possible for God to know and transform the 'actual schism in reason'; the outrage in man's being that was caused by his perverse desire to know good as evil? How is it possible for the incoherence of Original Sin to be changed into the coinherence of the heavenly life? The answer lies in the acts of God known, in artificial, but convenient, separation, as the Incarnation and the Atonement, and in The Forgiveness of Sins Williams elaborates those arguments already outlined in the earlier work in the chapter 'The Precursor and the Incarnation of the Kingdom'. The Atonement is by far the more prominent theme in the later work and, though Williams is still concerned to maintain the position that the Incarnation would have taken place whether men had sinned or not, the Incarnation is discussed throughout in terms of pardon: 'He became Forgiveness in the Flesh; he lived the life of Forgiveness'. Now that the condition of Sin exists, man is not simply united to God by a flesh-taking of the Word, but by a flesh-taking which involves a necessary action - redemption.

The Incarnation becomes thus the supreme act of pardon, and the stress falls on the word act. Williams's approach is unambiguously objective. The life and death of Jesus Christ is not merely the ultimate demonstration of God's love and mercy, something is actually accomplished 'objectively' on the Cross and in the Resurrection; the old pattern of sin and death is transformed, and, if the 'outrage' in man's being is to be transformed, it must be known by God in such a way that the act must be performed in the flesh, in the very being of man. The principle of

all existence is, as we have seen, exchange; in consequence this, the most significant of all activities, is an activity of exchange, and the theory of Atonement that Williams propounds is, one might almost say, flagrantly substitutionary. In doing this he separates himself from much that is traditional to Catholic and Anglican views of the saving work of Christ. O.C. Quick, for example, finds any literal approach to the idea of substitution incomprehensible.

> The language of substitution then is but an imperfect attempt to express the truth that in the crucifixion the divine love showed itself willing to endure to the uttermost for man the terrible consequences of sin which in justice should have fallen on the sinner. Christ, we may truly say, endured for us and on our behalf, though not strictly instead of us, what we could never have endured for ourselves.[1]

It is precisely the literal approach which Williams emphasises. The words 'instead of', so feared by Quick, are the words around which Williams constructs his doctrine.

> He substituted then his knowledge for their ignorance; his full consciousness for their partial; his reason for their unreason. The forgiveness became the Sacrifice.[2]

Are we then driven to placing Williams in the company of the classical thinkers of the Reformation? For to speak of a substitutionary theory of the Atonement in this way is, inevitably, to call up the shades of Luther and subsequent thinkers who developed the doctrine of Penal Substitution. The strange fact emerges that there is much in common between the approach of Luther and that of Williams. Williams's theory,

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1 Doctrines of the Creed (London, 1938), p.229.

2 The Forgiveness of Sins, p.154.

as will be seen from the later essay on The Cross, like Luther's, employs juridical categories. And, again like Luther, Williams sees the focal point of Christ's redemptive activity in the events of the suffering and death. He never turns his attention to a consideration of the life of Christ as such: the obedience of the Son to the will of the Father (an approach much in favour among Anglican theologians) is nowhere mentioned. It is not the obedient offering by Christ of Himself that accomplishes the re-union of man in God, it is the act in which the Incarnate Word substitutes Himself for man. Death, for Williams, as for Luther, is the final ratification of that state of separation, of schism both between God and man and also within man, which is the result of the Adamic fall from grace, and so it is in death that Christ has to make the act of substitution.

But although Williams adopts the forensic metaphor in his approach, neither the word 'justification' nor the concomitant idea of the imputation of righteousness, both of which are essential to Luther's belief and an integral part of his doctrine of the Atonement, are anywhere to be found in Williams's writings. This is because he excludes any notion of punishment for sins. Luther's theory - and both Melanchthon and Calvin follow the pattern of Luther's thought - here turns upon the idea of guilt and an inevitable penalty. The law of God is such that it demands death for sin, and the death of Christ is seen as the endurance of a punishment that ought properly to have been borne by man.

> Sin having been laid upon Him the law cometh and saith:
> Let every sinner die. So if thou wilt, O Christ, be surety,

be guilty and bear the penalty, bear also the sin and curse.[1]

The key-word is the word penalty, and in extreme forms of this interpretation, like Melanchthon's, there is almost no room for the love of God. 'All that remains is the thought of an angry God, who demands and receives the penalty that indignant justice claims'.[2]

For all the juridicism of his language Williams begins and ends with the idea of love, and the later essay on the Cross is a direct attempt to deal with the problematical contradiction which the notions of love and justice seem to present. But although his approach is governed by love

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From Luther's commentary on Galatians (1535), quoted by L.W. Grensted in his Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement (London, 1920). I realise that such a brief account of Luther's position does less than justice to the complexity and subtlety, as well as the inconsistency, of his thought. A quotation from his catechism (the Shorter Catechism of 1529) for instance, reveals a belief about the saving work of Christ which includes ideas of victory and sacrifice as well as that of penal substitution.

> I believe that Jesus Christ, very God, born of the Father in eternity, and also very man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and damned man, and has won and delivered me from all my sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold and silver, but with His holy and precious blood and with His innocent passion and death, so that I might be His own ....
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> (Documents of the Christian Church. Ed. by H. Bettenson).

But penal substitution lies at the heart both of his theology and his devotion, and his work became the fountain head of all the developed theories of the Reformation.

Cf. H. Rashdall, The Idea of the Atonement in Christian Theology (London, 1919), Lecture VII.
R.S. Franks, The Work of Christ (London, 1962), Pt.III.

2
L.W. Grensted, A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement, p.205.

and deliberately excludes the ideas of wrath and punishment, this does not place it in the company of those works which suggest that the death of Christ is best interpreted in exemplary terms, i.e. that in His death the world is presented with the greatest manifestation of God's willingness to identify Himself with the sufferings of His creation and by thus displaying His love call forth a similar response in men. Love, for Williams, is a creative power which accomplishes its object not by offering itself as an example but by the concrete act of substitution. It cannot work in any other way, for exchange is the root principle of all existence. Man's estranged condition demands that love be shown in death, so it is in death on the Cross that God makes His act of substitution in the person of Christ. The fallenness of man, and its consequence, death, did not create the necessity of substitution (which would be the classical Protestant position). If all life is to be lived vicariously then the 'actual schism in reason' means that only the death of the Incarnate Lord can work the atonement. In consequence, the only way of salvation for individual men is a way of substitutive love in which each must willingly endure the misery and pain of others. It is, literally, impossible for any man to save himself, love himself, forgive himself, live to himself. All must be done by others for him, and he must, in turn, save, forgive, love them. And the entire pattern of this exchanged life is redeemed by the supreme act of substitution when God's being co-inheres with man's, and so exchanging with man, God forgives as man, lives as man and dies as man.

In the last three chapters of <u>The Forgiveness of Sins</u> both the

strengths and weaknesses of Williams's mind are clearly exhibited. The book, as I have already indicated, is primarily an attempt to demonstrate the ways in which the abstract theology of He Came Down from Heaven can determine the shape and texture of everyday human life. One aspect of this attempt succeeds brilliantly; the second, complementary aspect, fails. In applying the principles at the level of intimate personal exchange his imagination probes as deeply into the secrets of the human heart here, in these chapters, as anywhere else in his work. In the sixth chapter, for example, The Technique of Pardon, we are given an exposition that is, at the same time, restrained and passionate, witty and profound, of the way in which the Christian is to 'carry' himself in performing his task of pardoning love towards all with whom he comes into contact.

> There is a tendency among some Christians to make a burden of things which non-Christians would pass over lightly. They overdo forgiveness as they overdo patience and other virtues.... Courtesy is our whole business towards our neighbours; it is indeed spiritual self-preservation; well, but then so is love. Love, we have been told, is slow to anger; it is, as a result slow to forgive, for it will not be in a hurry to assume that there is anything to forgive; and if there is, it will not be in a hurry to make a business of forgiving.[1]

The pitfalls of self-concern and priggishness that surround the lives of those attempting the practice of the Christian virtues are exposed with a sureness of touch that comes from the close observance of the way human beings really behave and not from a theoretical preconception about

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1 The Forgiveness of Sins, p.161.

personal relationships. Here, possibly, the imaginative eye of the artist has come to the assistance of the theologian. The complexities and difficulties of living the life of forgiveness are never, for a moment, underestimated.

> The first moment of forgiveness is nearly always confused with other things - with affection, with delight, with honour, with pride, with love of power; some good, some bad, all distracting.[1]

In returning to a subject which preoccupied him in He Came Down from Heaven: the relation between forgiving and forgetting, Williams, surprisingly, in view of the position he was at pains to uphold in that work, allows that 'oblivion' i.e. the forgetting of injuries, might be the best, and certainly the safest, way of practising forgiveness for human beings in ordinary everyday affairs. The deliberate recollection and acceptance of hurts and the incorporation of this 'knowledge' into a new pattern of love is an operation, it seems, that may safely be left to God, though there is some suggestion that this way of forgiveness might be attempted by some Christians whose maturity in love and holiness would prevent the recollection of injury from turning to bitterness or resentment.

> There are two methods of reconciliation: that which remembers the injury in love and that which forgets the injury in love. It is a delicate technique of pardon which can distinguish and (without self-consciousness) use either. Either may be desirable here and now, though there can, of course, be no question which is finally desirable and even necessary to the existence of the Blessed City. There (its architect told us and all its architecture maintains) all things are to be known. We had

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1 Ibid., p.167.

better not forget it; but even so, 'he that believeth shall not make haste'. Oblivion - say, perfect seclusion of the injury in God - is often here the safer means. It is often likely that to remember the injury would lead only to some opposite injury. Even the best-intentioned Christians are not always at ease in these sublime States.[1]

The mention of the 'City' brings us to the second, and the unsuccessful, aspect of Williams's 'practical' theology in this chapter: his attempt to work out some of the implications of his doctrines at the level of the 'polis', the organised life of the community. The problem is the exact relationship between the private life of Christian love and the public life of social organisation. As he turns to consider the city as it actually exists; that is, as he can see it embodied in the modern European state, his touch becomes less sure and his judgments lack confidence. The writing in this section is shot through with the painful awareness of the Second World War and the horror of the Nazi tyranny, and in this situation the ancient dilemma emerges with an appalling clarity. It is a dilemma as old as society itself, and one which lay behind the trick question put by the Pharisees and the Herodians to Christ, 'Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not?'. How is the reconciliation between the frequently conflicting duties of citizen and believer to be achieved.

> Must we, for example, consent that men, other men, shall be killed and maimed? The answer to that is simple - we must. We may do it by ourselves inflicting death and torment on others (by bombs or however), or we may do it by abandoning others to death and

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1 Ibid., p.168.

> torment (in concentration camps or wherever), but one way or the other we have to consent by our mere acts .... Such is the dilemma in which we find ourselves; and then what happens to forgiveness?[1]

His attempt to face the problem to some extent follows the lines suggested in Christ's own answer, 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.' It is an answer which, in its deliberate ambiguity, operates at a number of levels. First, there is the recognition of the individual's social responsibility in the community to which he is committed (however ironically the statement may be interpreted, the utterance cannot be taken as a kind of carte blanche for opting out of responsibility as a member of society). Secondly, there is the refusal to provide a doctrine of the state, or map out a detailed programme for political behaviour.[2] Thirdly, in the context of the kerygma, the proclamation of the kingdom of God, the question of the Pharisees and Christ's retort display the extent to which they have misunderstood the real nature and purpose of Jesus and His ministry.

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1 Ibid., pp.172-173.

2 Even C.E.B. Cranfield's moderately conservative commentary on Mark's Gospel argues against attaching a definitely political significance to these words.

> Here Jesus is not saying that there are two quite separate independent spheres, that of Caesar and that of God (for Caesar and all that is his belong to God); but he is indicating that there are obligations to Caesar which do not infringe the rights of God but are indeed ordained by God. The answer of Jesus is of far-reaching importance; but is not by itself capable of being the basis for a Christian doctrine of the state or of the Church's obligation to the state.
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> The Gospel according to St. Mark, p.372.

But cf. H.B. Swete's commentary on the same passage from Mark's gospel where the political implications are seen to be more definite.

Williams, as can be seen from the passage cited, clearly recognises the social and political responsibilities each citizen must shoulder. It is precisely the realisation of this responsibility that makes the Christian's position in a state which is at war almost intolerable. Williams too refuses to supply a detailed programme for political activity, but he does cast a glance at the idea of a theocracy knowing full well not only the dangers inherent in the attempt of setting up a Christian state, but also the virtual impossibility of ever succeeding. It should be noticed in passing that his theocracy would differ radically from any that have ever been conceived. Apart from his suggestion that 'the courts operate in a parallel order to the confessionals', he sees built into his state the most extraordinary judicial system ever devised; a system of vicarious punishment, a system in which the innocent might willingly suffer the penalties of the guilty. It is intended to be a political society built upon the foundation of a belief in the efficacy of substitution in love.

> Whether in a profoundly Christian State it would be possible for the Church to produce a Guild of those who would vicariously bear the legal penalties of the confessed criminals, even perhaps to the death penalty itself, if that were still imposed, is but a dream.[1]

And being a dream it is set aside - unfortunately, in the circumstances, for it would have been instructive to see what connection Williams would have made between this system of vicarious suffering and the Passion and Death of Christ; it seems, on the surface, that there might be a serious

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1 The Forgiveness of Sins, p.173.

disjunction between the two. The language of penal substitution, so carefully avoided in his discussion of the Atonement, cannot escape prominence in these practical political considerations. Could it be, one is tempted to argue, that his doctrine of the atoning work of Christ is really a form of the Penal Substitutionary theory? Such a temptation should be avoided for two reasons. The first is that the argument distorts the shape and character of the essay as a whole by attaching too much importance to something which comes as a somewhat bizarre footnote to the main purpose. This short section, however provocative, is an instance of the author 'trailing his coat', and although it must be taken seriously, it cannot properly be used as a basis for the kind of argument which has been supposed. Secondly, there is no justification for saying that the judicial system of the state must be taken as the proper analogy of the operation of God's justice in His creation. Again it must be pointed out that Williams's emphasis falls on the idea of substitution. Consequently, given a system in which guilt and punishment have become inescapable elements of the political process, the loving act of substitution automatically operates in this area as in all others. And this situation, the apparent impossibility of reconciling the justice of God and the judicial processes of men, is perhaps the most poignant aspect of the dilemma, and one from which Williams tends to retreat. In answer to the question 'What happens to forgiveness?' he returns to the world of literature and to a further examination of what forgiveness means in Shakespeare. But this refusal to proceed further may be a tacit adoption of the implications of the words of Christ already referred

to. Individual men are to concentrate on the practice of forgiveness in every moment of their ordinary lives - there is no other way into the kingdom of God. The state can never be the Church, the dilemma remains, but paradoxically, it is still the duty of the individual Christian to hope for, and work towards, the Blessed City knowing that its walls can never be built on earth.

In the second to last chapter, The Forgiveness and Reconciliation, Williams returns to the Revelations of Divine Love by Julian of Norwich and the supremely confident assertion that 'All shall be well'. As forgiveness involves not the forgetting of the actions of the past but the incorporation of them into a new pattern of knowledge, so the supreme act of pardon involves the acceptance and transformation of man's sin. All shall be well - even sin, paradoxically, '... the acts, the sin itself exists in him, as all things exist in him'.[1] And Williams drives this belief through to its inexorable conclusion; if all things, including sin, exist in Him, hell must also, after some manner, exist in Him. Expressed as baldly as this it seems a strange notion, yet, fundamentally some such position is not an unorthodox view of hell and damnation. Williams's perception, however, is so keen and his style so vivid that the paradoxical nature of the belief stands out with unusual clarity.

> The Atonement is the name given to an operation; an operation beyond our comprehension, but not beyond our attention; an operation by which everything - even hell - was made part of the final Glory.[2]

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1 Ibid., p.186.

2 Ibid., p.183.

Essays.

Between 1938 and 1943 Williams produced nearly all of his most important essays, and if one were to be left with only these occasional pieces - reviews, introductions, feature articles - one would, nonetheless, be in possession of the core of his theology. As one might expect, there are close connections between the ideas and attitudes of the essays and those of the longer works which belong to the same period. In, for example, the essay on Blake and Wordsworth, written for The Dublin Review of April, 1941, there is a paragraph that could serve as a blueprint for the sixth chapter of The Forgiveness of Sins. Commenting on certain passages from Blake's long poem Jerusalem he writes:

> From this point the theme of the Forgiveness of Sins advances, a vision of Heaven and Earth .... It is the operation of 'offering oneself for another,' ... there can be only two attitudes towards the sin of another towards oneself; one is to entertain a grudge, the other is not to entertain a grudge. To entertain it is precisely to prefer the selfhood to that other, that is precisely not to offer oneself; and in consequence ... to prevent one properly apprehending how another is offered instead of oneself. It is as necessary to accept the sacrifice as to make it, and as necessary to live from it.[1]

One of the most easily observable connections is that between The Descent of the Dove and the fourteen essays grouped together by Anne Ridler in her collection The Image of the City under the two general titles The City and Exchange.[2] Their common factor is the theme of co-inherence. The essays approach the subject from a variety of angles;

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1 The Image of the City, p.66.

2 pp.92-130 and pp.147-168 respectively.

more than half of them were book reviews for the periodical Time and Tide, one is a free-ranging, personal essay on current affairs,[1] and one, 'The Image of the City in English Verse', as its title implies, is an exercise, idiosyncratic and provocative, in literary criticism. The most substantial of the essays, and also the most central to our present concerns, are the two specifically theological ones 'The Redeemed City' and 'The Way of Exchange'.

Both essays were written in 1941 and, not unnaturally, show marked similarities to one another. The first correspondence lies in the area of Williams's doctrine of Creation: the insistence, which has been noted before, that co-inherence and substitution is an inescapable fact and condition of all existence, whether Christian or not, redeemed or unredeemed, and that the Incarnation is both the demonstration of the fact that it is a principle of Divine life as well as of human life, and the transformation of the pattern of human exchange into the pattern of Divine exchange. In these two compositions Williams seeks to prove the co-inherence of all life at the natural level by singling out sexual activity and the operations of childbirth. 'The Redeemed City' states the case briefly.

> The name of the City is union .... The process of that union is by the method of free exchange. The methods of that exchange range from childbirth to the Eucharist - the two primal activities of the earth and the Church.[2]

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1 'Antichrist and the City's Laws'.

2 The Image of the City, p.103.

This slightly rhetorical and vaguely suggestive statement is amplified in 'The Way of Exchange' where he is far more explicit about his reasons for choosing sexual intercourse and childbirth as evidence for the principle of co-inherence.

> There is one great natural fact - a fact at the very root of all human facts - which involves a relation very much of the nature of exchange, or of something more than exchange. It is the fact of childbirth .... The man is quite helpless to produce a child unless he surrenders the means /his seed/ to someone else; the woman is as helpless unless she receives the means from someone else .... They do something together, but they do it by an act (as regards the child) of substitution.[1]

The whole of the animate world can be seen to be built up on this structure of exchange - the living in and creation by means of another creature. The principle can be denied and distorted, but only by the wilful refusal in the heart of man; the flesh, like the lower orders of creation, must, by nature, submit to the processes of co-inherence. For this reason Williams's doctrine of Man lays particular emphasis on the perversion of the mind and the will and on the innocence of the body, or rather (and more accurately) on the body's involvement in the whole web of sin only as a result of its unbreakable union with the mind. (This interpretation will be discussed at greater length later). Using the operations of sexual intercourse and childbirth as an image of co-inherence at the natural level Williams, in 'The Redeemed City', tentatively constructs a definition of the sacrament of baptism in terms of, what he calls, a supernatural co-inherence.

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1 Ibid., p.150.

> The new-born child emerges from its natural co-inherence in its mother into a supernatural co-inherence with the saints. It has received the communication of the evil of a fallen world; its blood is tainted from its soul - or from a world of souls - with the Infamy, and it will soon begin disastrously to pay back what it has disastrously received, in the exchanges (unless redeemed) of infernal conflict. At that moment it is caught by others and lifted into an exchange of grace - into others by others, into Another by Another.[1]

The passage has a number of noteworthy features. First, this is the closest Williams comes to placing 'natural' and 'supernatural' in an antithetical relationship. It might almost be said that here we are given an argument which resembles the Pauline opposition of Flesh and Spirit. The supernatural life is the life of the Spirit, the life of Grace as a member of the Body of Christ. But, of course, the antithesis between natural and supernatural is not nearly so thoroughgoing as Paul's opposition - one is not at war with other. And the phrase 'into Another by Another' carries associations of the 'deification' of man that are not usually present in the phrase 'the life of Grace'. Williams's occasional ambiguity in the use of the term 'supernatural' has already been referred to; sometimes it produces vagueness, on this occasion it is richly significant. In baptism man is incorporated into the Church and by this incorporation is actually made part of the life of God, taken up, by Christ and in Christ, into the exchanged love of the Trinity.

Secondly, the Church stands at the very centre of his approach. Ostensibly the passage is a kind of commentary on the rite of baptism in

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1 Ibid., p.106

the Church, but the concept of cleansing - a washing away of sin and guilt symbolised by the actual use of water in the administration of the sacrament - is not mentioned. Nor is the death of Christ, together with the Pauline concept of the individual's dying and rising, a significant element in Williams's approach. Yet he is not untrue to the spirit of the Prayer Book rite of baptism as can be seen from an examination of the prayer which follows immediately upon the act of 'immersion'.[1] Williams certainly does not speak of the crucifixion of the 'old man' nor of the abolition of the whole 'body of sin', but his attention, like those of the authors of the prayer, is focussed upon the rescuing of the individual personality from an old organism, which can be experienced only as pain and death (the 'natural' co-inherence), and its incorporation into a new organism which is the Body of Christ (the 'supernatural' co-inherence). And, for all its emphasis on the notion of incorporation and the absence of the idea of cleansing, Williams's apprehension of the fallenness of man's nature could hardly be more serious. In its own way this passage describes the corruption and distortion of the human soul (including that of the newly born child) with as much vigour as the writings of Augustine and the Ninth Article

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'We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this Infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own Child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy Church. And humbly we beseech thee to grant that he being dead unto sin, and living unto righteousness, and being buried with Christ in his death, may crucify the old man, and utterly abolish the whole body of sin; and that, as he is made partaker of the death of thy Son, he may also be partaker of his resurrection; so that finally, with the residue of thy holy Church, he may be an inheritor of thine everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

of the Thirty Nine Articles. But it does outline the doctrine in an idiosyncratic way and this idiosyncrasy leads to a further observation.

Williams, quite in accordance with orthodox Christian teaching on the Fall, locates the origin of sin in the soul and not in the body. The body cannot escape involvement in corruption because of its inseparable union with the soul - the 'blood is tainted' - but the evil it possesses and endures is by derivation only. Consequently (though there is no specific mention of the idea here) Williams argues that the true pattern of creation is more easily discernible in the physical body than in the operations of the spirit. With his tongue in his cheek he plays a little linguistic game by using a Platonic phrase, 'a world of souls', for anti-Platonic purposes.[1]

Finally an observation about the concluding sentence. It contains an echo of the cry of Felicitas recorded in The Descent of the Dove: 'Another shall be in me' and summarises Williams's whole conception of substitution and co-inherence. From the moment of the child's baptism he is sustained, and Williams means this literally, not only by the lives of the members of the body which has received him, but by Christ who lives in him and for him. There is expressed here the actual substitution of human beings for each other - the activity of love portrayed in the

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His enjoyment in the manipulation of words leads occasionally to verbal flatulence as well. For instance, it is difficult to see what precisely he intends by the words 'infernal conflict' in this very passage. They cannot refer to an engagement between extra-terrestrial powers. Perhaps they are intended to refer to forces localised within human beings, but the whole clause is opaque, and I must conclude that his love for rhetorical display betrayed him into a high-sounding but empty assertion.

novel Descent Into Hell - and the substitution of Christ for all men investigated and defined in He Came Down from Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins. This sentence is 'caught up' in 'The Way of Exchange' where it is expanded into a more technically theological exposition.

> The doctrine of the Christian Church has declared that the mystery of the Christian religion is a doctrine of co-inherence and substitution. The Divine Word co-inheres in God the Father ... but also He has substituted His Manhood for ours in the secrets of the Incarnation and the Atonement. The principle of the Passion is that He gave His life 'for' - that is, instead of and on behalf of - ours. In that sense He lives in us and we in Him, He and we co-inhere.[1]

Once again it is necessary to draw attention to the statement 'instead of and on behalf of' i.e. to Williams's insistence that a direct and actual substitution was made on Calvary, that Jesus Christ was not merely the representative of mankind, but the substitute for it.

Some notion of exchange must be present in all orthodox approaches to the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement, but, so far as can be ascertained, no theologian has emphasised its importance in the way Williams does. In this relentless insistence on seeing exchange as the cardinal principle of all life, God's as well as man's, and the literal actuality and practicality of the operation, he seems to be unique. There have, of course, been writers in whom we can find the centrality of the belief being expressed: two theologians who approach Williams's own apprehension are the anonymous author of the second century document known as The Epistle to Diognetus and, not surprisingly, Augustine. A

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1 The Forgiveness of Sins, p.152.

passage from the second century document reads as follows:

> He gave up His own Son a Ransom for us, the Holy for the lawless, the Sinless for the sinners, the just for the unjust, the Incorruptible for the corrupt, the Immortal for mortals. For what else but His righteousness could cover our sins? Wherein could we lawless and impious ones be justified, but in the Son of God alone? O sweet exchange, O inscrutable working, O unhoped-for blessings. That the iniquity of many should be in One righteous man, and that the righteousness of One should justify many lawless ones.[1]

The similarity between these words and the passage from The Forgiveness of Sins beginning 'He substituted then his knowledge for our ignorance ....' (already quoted) is easily discerned: there are, however, important differences. The intensity of feeling behind the phrases of The Epistle to Diognetus prevents the outpourings from being merely a rhetorical display, but at the same time this very passion makes the doctrinal significance difficult to assess. To what extent can it be a serious theological exposition of the saving work of Christ (it was not intended as such) and to what extent an effective poetic expression of a deeply-felt, but subjective, knowledge of personal union with Christ?

Augustine is prepared to be more definitely theological in his approach, and a passage from the eightieth sermon (de script. N.T.) shows him advocating the idea strongly.

> God died, that a kind of celestial exchange might be made, that men might not see death ... Forasmuch as He is both God and man, wishing that we should live by that which was His, He died by that which was ours .... So then neither could He have death by that

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1 The Epistle to Diognetus, Par. 9. The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. II. Trans. W. Burton (Ancient & Modern Theological Library).

> which was His, nor we life by that which was ours; but we have life by that which is His, and he death by what is ours. What an exchange![1]

We have already seen that Williams found in Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin a wonderful, though terrible, exposition of co-inherence, and it is possibly Augustine, in this passage, who comes closest to expressing what Williams understood by exchange. Yet even here we cannot be sure that Augustine is intending to construct a precise and systematic doctrine of Incarnation and Atonement based, deliberately, on the idea of exchange. The context is a sermon, the tone is polemical, and the intention is less that of instruction than that of arousing a devotional response in the hearts of the listeners. Furthermore he does not go on in his expository essays to use the principle as the lynch-pin of his approach to these operations of God. Williams does precisely this, and his distinctiveness lies in that fact. He is, from time to time, just as passionate as the anonymous second century author and Augustine, but his passion arises out of his utter certainty that the whole of existence is built up on the principle and that the whole secret of life is contained in the grasping of its meaning. Exchange is simply and indisputably <u>there</u>, it can be ignored, it can be accepted, it cannot be altered.

In May 1939 the periodical <u>Theology</u> published an article by Williams

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1 Quoted in <u>An Augustine Synthesis</u>, arr. by E. Przywara (London, 1936) p.190.

in which he offered the opinion that the Church owed far more to heretics than she was ever prepared to recognise.[1] The article itself is an appraisal of the work of a man he calls 'a convinced and rhetorical heretic' of the twentieth century; David Herbert Lawrence. It must be remembered that ten years after Lawrence's death (the date of this essay) defendants of his work and life were still few in number, a state of affairs that makes Williams's article a remarkable utterance for a Christian literary critic. There are occasional weaknesses, especially in the negative judgments, but it shows a sensitive awareness, not only of the artistic power, but of a moral authority lying behind even the most ridiculous and extravagent of Lawrence's poses and gestures. This sympathetic response to the writings of a man whose outlook and temperament differed so considerably from his own is puzzling until one recalls the seriousness with which Williams always approached questions of the physical and material side of human life. Co-inherence is the first of the two principal connections between the essays and the books of this period (1938-1942); the second is this: the preoccupation with the significance of the human body.

The beauty of the flesh and its possible meaning in the pattern of God's creative activity has been a recurrent motif in his work, and throughout this study attention has been drawn to his singular approach to the subject. What has been hinted at in the poems and novels, or dealt with briefly in the plays and historical books now assumes a position

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1 The Image of the City, p.69.

of central importance. Four essays treat the matter directly: the article on Lawrence already mentioned, entitled 'Sensuality and Substance'; an article from the same periodical Theology, published two years later, in May, 1941, under the title 'Natural Goodness'; a contribution to The Dublin Review of July 1942 called 'The Index of the Body'; and the introduction to the World's Classics edition of John Milton's poems, published in 1940. And in 1942 Williams proceeded to incorporate the main outlines of the arguments of these essays in The Forgiveness of Sins.

First there is the question, referred to earlier, of the relation between the soul and the body. Here Williams tends to diverge from the traditional attitudes of Western Christendom. This is one of the few instances, for example, when we find him at variance with the formulations of Thomas Aquinas. In the Seventy Sixth Question of the First Part of the Summa Theologica (Of the Union of the Body and the Soul), Thomas asserts of the soul that 'to be united to the body belongs to the soul by reason of itself', and further, that 'the human soul retains its own proper existence when separated from the body, having an aptitude and a natural inclination to be united to the body'. In some sense, therefore, the soul is seen to be the essence of the human personality which expresses itself by the means of the instrument of the body. The doctrine does, fundamentally, reduce the body to a position of secondary, though, of course, necessary importance. The dissolution of the body on death does not necessarily entail the destruction of the soul. In fact, the soul awaits the Resurrection when it will again, in some sense, be rejoined to a body. This definition is Dante's doctrinal foundation

in The Divine Comedy. The 'shades' whom the poet meets on his journey through Hell and Purgatory are souls - in one case lost, in the other saved - awaiting the Resurrection and the Consummation of all things. Even so, Williams eschews this doctrine. For him the union of body and soul is a far more intimate one and cannot be adequately described in Thomas's terms of reason and inclination, but only in terms of metaphysical necessity in which there is 'neither before nor after'. The soul does not have a 'natural inclination' to be united - to express itself by means of - the body; it has no possibility of existence without the body. It was only the Fall which introduced the possibility of knowing them in separation. In The Forgiveness of Sins he postulates that body and soul originally created in unbreakable union - he uses the word 'co-inhere' for this union - could be known, though not endured, in opposition to one another.

> ... the breach between body and soul, the breach in the indivisible, was fully established. The great physical ratification of that breach was Death .... It is an outrage; it is a necessary outrage. It is a schism between those two great categories of physical and spiritual which formed the declaration in unity of one identity.[1]

In view of this emphasis on the absolute unity of soul and body it comes as something of a surprise to find that in his interpretation of the orthodox Catholic teaching on the origin of sin he not only allows the distinction between the two by specifically locating the origin of sin in the will of man, but carries the interpretation to the extreme of postulating that the flesh, because Original Sin is an alteration in

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1 The Forgiveness of Sins, pp.127-128.

knowledge, can be regarded as 'less fallen' than the soul. This curious position is unambiguously presented in two of the essays of this period: 'The Way of Affirmation' and 'The Index of the Body'. The following extract is taken from the latter.

> The body was holily created, is holily redeemed, and is to be holily raised from the dead. It is, in fact, for all our difficulties, less fallen, merely in itself, than the soul in which the quality of the will is held to reside; for it was a sin of the will which degraded us.[1]

It might be argued that Williams is doing nothing more in this passage than paraphrase a familiar position in Christian moral theology that all sins arise in the will of the individual and that those sins which find physical expression are frequently less serious than those which have no outward manifestation. This, I believe, would be a false reading; Williams is, quite specifically and intentionally, talking metaphysics here and not morals, and moreover, the same conception can be seen to be expressed, more obliquely, elsewhere, e.g. in the essay 'Natural Goodness' and in The Forgiveness of Sins. It is perhaps some such apprehension as this that underlies the many occasions in earlier works when the body is seen as an image of the pattern of God's glory and a vehicle for the

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1 The Image of the City, pp.84-85.

revelation of His splendour.[1]

In the extract just quoted, Williams does, to some extent, 'cover' himself by adding the clause 'merely in itself' to his most surprising statement, but it does not seriously affect the main outlines of his argument. His is a position, it should be added, which contrasts strongly with that of the theologian for whom he had the highest regard and from whom he gained so much that became part of his own theological apprehension - Augustine. The fifth century theologian is as concerned as anyone else to stress the fact that sin lies in the wilful, spiritual rebellion of man, but in his psychology, the spirit, the 'rational creature' is intended to be master of the body. The result of Adam's

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It is perhaps worth recalling that the question of the location of the seat of sin in human nature became one of the cardinal issues in the Apollinarian controversy of the fourth century. Apollinarius's determined opposition to, what later came to be called, the 'diophysite' strain in Antiochene Christology, led him to repeated insistence that if the divine nature and the human nature did not exist in an absolute, metaphysical unity in the person of Jesus Christ, then the salvation of all men was in danger. In an attempt to define the nature of this union he had recourse to 'an extreme version of the Word-flesh Christology' (cf. J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines). It was not sufficient that Godhead and manhood be seen as dwelling together in Jesus; the Word of God - the Divine Logos - becomes the life-giving and formative principle of His Being. In effect, the rational soul, the vital force of human nature, is supplanted by the Logos. In consequence, the metaphysical union is achieved only, as Apollinarius's opponents were quick to point out, by robbing the God-man of a real humanity. In their attack on the heretic the Cappadocian fathers, among other things, emphasised that it was precisely in the rational soul, the mind and will of man - the Adam - that sin is to be located. If therefore this part of man's being was not united with Divinity in Christ, how was it possible for man to be saved?
It will be noticed that both Apollinarius and his opponents stressed the sinlessness of the body i.e. considered in itself.

disobedience is the loss of spiritual control, and the consequence of this is a wild disorder of the sexual passions. It is probably Augustine's emphasis rather than the logic of his position which is disquieting, but even so, from time to time it seems as if he was actually prepared to denounce the desires of the flesh as inherently evil.[1] Augustine's theories fitted well and, indeed, bolstered the growing tendency of the Catholic Church to value virginity for its own sake and to regard continence more highly than marriage.

In The Forgiveness of Sins Williams castigates the Church for precisely this; a tendency towards a kind of Manicheeism in its attitude to the material creation and especially the human flesh. 'We have, except for the poets, rather lost this sense of the body; we have not only despised it too much, but we have not admired it enough'.[2] And he cites Milton, Wordsworth, Patmore, and Lawrence as poets who demonstrate ways in which the body can properly be understood and admired. In his introduction to Milton's poems there is a brief discussion, centring on the masque Comus, in which the virtue of chastity is upheld as the cardinal principle of, not only social, but religious behaviour. The practice of the virtue is important, not because the body needs to be restrained from the exercise of its natural impulses - which any form of Manicheeism regards as inherently evil - but because nothing other than

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1 Cf. John Burnaby, Amor Dei (1933) Ch. VII for a full and perceptive evaluation of Augustine's doctrine of Concupiscence.

2 p.125.

chastity serves it with the reverence that is due to its glory.[1] Chastity is seen as a quality of life which immortalises the already adorable flesh. The point made in this introduction is re-iterated and developed in The Forgiveness of Sins.[2] It is interesting to place these assertions alongside one of the classical statements of Christianity on the same subject: St. Paul's exposition in the sixth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians, and note the similarities.[3] In this particular passage the Apostle's ideas pour out in a thick stream, and there is no space here to explicate one of the most densely-packed pieces of his writing; only a few features can be singled out for brief comment. First, there is no trace of that harsh Puritanism, almost Manichean in its expression, which is frequently associated with Paul. The stress on the necessity for chastity (not abstinence) does not have its roots in a suspicion of the flesh, but, quite simply, in a reverence for it as something precious, fragile and holy. The material

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1 D.H. Lawrence's abhorrence of sexual promiscuity is based largely upon the same kind of belief. Cf. the essay The State of Funk in Phoenix II (1968).

2 The body was made as the physical formula of the Virtues .... Chastity is the obedience to and relation with the adorable central body. (p.126)

3 Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord: and the Lord for the body .... Know ye not that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit .... What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.
(I Cor. vi. 13-20)

part of our nature is seen to be joined with God in a particular way. In all of this Williams resembles Paul. But at the centre of the Pauline picture stands the Church, the Spirit-filled community, the Body of Christ of which all baptised Christians are members. There is no direct reference to the Church in Williams's approach, and where Paul makes much of the holiness of the body by reason of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, Williams avoids all mention of the work of the Spirit. For Williams the sanctity of the human flesh is not the result of a Divine Spiritual gift, it is holy by reason of the Incarnate Lord; men and God are joined in the fleshly body of Jesus. Paul does not leave this aspect out of account - the human body, for example, is capable of resurrection because of the glorified and resurrected body of Christ - but he interprets it differently. It is primarily because of the process of sanctification that the flesh of man has become able to bear the glory of its Creator, and the Church is the place in which this sanctification is begun. In a sense, one can say that Williams had a lower doctrine of the Church than Paul and a higher doctrine of Creation. For him every body, whether part of the Church or not, was an image of God's life and splendour and holy because of this. The work of the Spirit is a work of revelation and 'consolation'; of giving men the knowledge of the facts of their existence and empowering them to live by this knowledge.

In the essay 'The Index of the Body' Williams states his doctrine of Man most explicitly, and we find ourselves being led back in the direction of that exposition of the Incarnation which was discussed earlier: that

the flesh-taking was not caused by the Fall of man and, metaphysically, must be regarded as preceding creation. In short, the burden of the essay is that the body is not merely one of the most important vehicles for the communication of heavenly splendour but also is the microcosm of the whole created order. The word 'index' is important for Williams takes as the starting-point of his exposition the lines of Wordsworth from the seventh book of The Prelude, '... the human form/ To me became an index of delight'. (11.279-231) The body is seen as the index to the universe: it holds in itself (and Williams means, quite specifically, its physical organisation) the meaning of the organisation of the universe. By consulting the index one can discover one's place in the text; the understanding of the movements and the life of the body gives the clue to the understanding of the movements and the life of all creation. He makes his point plain by reference to the ancient science of astrology.

> Astrology ... however we may reject that ancient study ... had at least this philosophic principle mixed up with it - that each man, being unique, was a unique image of the universe ....[1]

The same point is made in an entirely different, and utterly startling, way in the two cycles of Arthurian poems where the image of the body is used as the primary image of the 'Empire', itself an image of the whole universe. The allegory is thoroughgoing and systematic. Each part of the human body is made to correspond to a different region of the Empire,

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1 The Image of the City, p.82.

and the intimate connection between the workings of the body and the movements of the stars is the underlying theme of every poem.

This emphasis on the solidarity of, not only humanity, but the whole of creation is entirely different from that of the nature poets of the nineteenth century. Williams was not a Romantic in this sense, and their quasi-pantheistic attitudes to Nature are as foreign to his mind as they were to that of his contemporary, D.H. Lawrence. Both of these men saw human beings as an integral part of the natural order, intimately joined to it, affected by its movements and, in some sense, both explaining it and being explained by it. The principles governing the life of man are those which run through the structure of the universe. Lawrence's remark in his essay, 'A propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover', that we '... are bleeding at the roots, because we are cut off from the earth and the sun and the stars ....'[1] could have been uttered by Williams in a moment of despair. But Williams, despite his intense awareness of the darker side of life, could not give himself over to despair as Lawrence occasionally did. Men might distort the structure of their own existence and corrupt its forces, but they were ultimately powerless to destroy a pattern that has been decreed by God and embodied in its perfection by His Incarnate Son.

> The Sacred Body is the plan upon which physical human creation was built, for it is the centre of physical human creation.[2]

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1 A propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover, (Penguin Books, 1961), p.110.

2 The Image of the City, p.86.

And, as this essay is at pains to demonstrate, not merely physical 'human' creation. The Sacred Body - so to describe the Person of Jesus - is the centre of the entire physical order, the 'natural world', as he called it. It is the explanation of, and the reason for the whole of creation. Incarnation being intended, God purposes the creation of matter as well. The question of time i.e. that the birth of Jesus occurs at a particular moment of the world's history aeons after the initial act of creation is not regarded as relevant by Williams.

In this essay 'Natural Goodness' he returns to Duns Scotus and the Incarnational theories he associated with him, driving his own interpretation of the theories to an extreme never conceived of by the Medieval scholar or any others mentioned by Westcott in his historical survey of that strand of theology. At the close of his essay The Gospel of Creation Westcott states the essentials of this approach with admirable clarity.

> ... it cannot be said that a belief in the absolute [my italics] purpose of the Incarnation is at variance with Scripture. Nor does it in any way derogate from the Infinite love of God .... It adds to every motive of devout gratitude which is suggested by the circumstances of the Incarnation, a further motive of gratitude in the contemplation of that primal love which the self-will of man could not thwart ....[1]

In just the same way Williams argues that the Fall and Original Sin are to be regarded as incidental to God's Incarnational activity, inescapable facts which have to be dealt with, but not facts which are actually the

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1 The Epistles of St. John, pp.327-328.

cause of the flesh-taking of the Word, though the Incarnation, because of them, takes on a certain shape and can be spoken of only in terms of reconciliation and atonement. But he is not content to leave the matter of the relation between Creation and Incarnation there. The difference between his position and that of Westcott (as well as the scholars Westcott cites) can be seen clearly in the following extract from 'Natural Goodness':

> ... the Incarnation is the point of creation, and the divine 'reason' for it. It pleased God in His self-willed activity to be incarnate. But obviously this union of Himself with matter in flesh did not necessarily involve the creation of other flesh. It would have been sufficient to Himself to be Himself united with matter, and that 'united with' means a union very much beyond our powers to conceive; more than a union, a unity .... His act could have been to Himself alone. He decreed that it should not be; He determined creation ....[1]

This is Williams's strongest and clearest statement of his position. Creation is supremely an act of grace flowing from the desire of God to be incarnate. Metaphysically then, Incarnation precedes Creation, but God 'deigned to create joy after this manner also'. Again, it might be pointed out that this does not constitute, what might be called, a Logos doctrine. Nowhere in his work do we find a developed interpretation of Creation by means of the Second Person of the Trinity, the agency of the Divine Word. His attention is always fixed on the Word-already-made-flesh.

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1 The Image of the City, p.76.

Towards the end of 'The Index of the Body' Williams uses a phrase that leads us in the direction of discovering the psychological reasons for his distinctive, not to say eccentric, interpretation of these doctrines of Creation and Incarnation: 'the imperial structure of the body carries its own high doctrines'. It could be a line from one os his early verses, but it is not merely a piece of high-flown rhetoric, it reveals his sensibility and gives the starting-point for his theological approach. His theology is rooted in his experience of human love and beauty. So intense in his awareness of the force of human emotion and the splendour and mystery of the flesh that he is content to read the whole of God's activity in terms of the experience. In the real fleshly existence of the beloved is contained the whole wonder of the universe for the lover. Williams's espousal of the theories outlined does not arise out of a careful and detached consideration of the doctrines of the creed or the writings of the Old and New Testaments, but out of a poetic awareness of certain facets, frightening in their power and beauty, of human experience. By the strange alchemy of his own creative powers this personal vision is translated into the 'rich and strange' structures of a theological system.

CHAPTER V

1943 - 1945

The spate of reviews and articles began to abate after 1942, and in the two years which preceded Williams's death only three essays relevant to our present purpose appeared. One was the literary essay 'Malory and the Grail Legend' printed in The Dublin Review, April, 1944. The other two were 'A Dialogue on Hierarchy' - obliquely theological - printed in Time and Tide in October, 1943, and 'The Cross': a contribution in the same year to a symposium headed What the Cross means to Me.

In this last essay Williams turns again to an exploration of the darker side of human life. It is one of the strengths of his theology that the problem of pain is never evaded or dealt with only in abstract philosophical terms, but investigated and understood at the most intimate human levels. 'The Cross' explores the problem of evil in the light of the suffering and death of Christ. The tone of the essay is severe and restrained, almost muted, and its thought and feeling is the closest Williams ever came to an attitude of stoical resignation.

The argument revolves around the notion of justice, and there is a kind of quiet defiance behind the assertion which is used as the starting-point for the discussion.

> ... it is not credible that a finite choice (the rebellion of the Adam) ought to result in an infinite distress; or rather let it be said that, though credible, it is not tolerable (to us) that the Creator should deliberately maintain and sustain His created universe in a state of infinite distress as a result of that choice. No doubt it is possible to Him[1]

The essay poses, with the subtlety and compassion of the poet's insight, the age-old problem of humanity: how is it possible to reconcile the concept of a just and loving God with the everyday world of misery and death. It is not, of course, a new theme in Williams's work. Previously he has found the problem being posed most sharply in the Biblical book of Job and in Shakespeare's tragedy King Lear. Both works hinge on the idea of justice in the universe. In Job the resolution of the problem (in so far as there is a resolution) is a theophany: God's answer is to make the question irrelevant. In Lear the final picture is one of bitter resignation tempered only by human pity and tenderness. It is easy enough for man to believe in a malicious God or an indifferent Creator, but the universe becomes, in that case, experientially, intolerable, and human existence pointless. All that Williams asks in this essay is that one's experience of the world should be tolerable and that human life should be seen to possess meaning. The sense of glory at the heart of things and the belief in the wonderful transformation of existence which is at the core of He Came Down from Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins seems, almost deliberately, to have been excluded from 'The Cross'. In the light of these two works, as of almost everything else he wrote,

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1 The Image of the City, p.131.

'The Cross' presents, at first, a bewildering volte face on the question of the final destiny of man.

> .... I cannot say I find the idea of immortality, even a joyous immortality, much more attractive. [than the idea of annihilation] I admit, of course, that this is a failure of intelligence; if joy is joy, an infinite joy cannot be undesirable.[1]

The essay does not extend beyond a search for, what might be called, 'meaning'; for a way of enabling men "to use the word 'justice' without shame".[2] And Williams postulates that it is only the Cross - the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ - which enables man to do just that.

The line of thought that is pursued in this essay can be traced back a long way in Williams's thought - to a poem that has already been mentioned, one of the bitter and dark verses of the 1924 volume Windows of Night - 'The Two Domes'. As the poet contemplates the domes of St. Paul's cathedral and the Old Bailey he muses upon the apparent conflict between love and justice in a world that is wracked by fear, dissension, pain and hatred.

> If judges some day having uttered their judgment arose
> And themselves in the doomed man's stead were drawn to the bitter
> Torment of prison or death - would that cure the woes
> We suffer, and quench the unquenchable fiery pang?
>
> Not for love's sake - leave that to a god!
> Not for love only but only to bring the irrational in!
> Madness might wander where sanity never trod
> And find the secret and strike the irony dumb;[3]

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1 Ibid., p.135.

2 Ibid., p.133.

3 Windows of Night, p.23.

These lines are the seeds of this disconcertingly 'off-centre' investigation of the doctrine of the Atonement.

He announces at an early point in the essay that God must, in some sense, be regarded as responsible for the evil in the world. Referring to the sentence passed (the framework of the essay is a legal one) on Jesus he says:

> Our justice condemned the innocent, but the innocent it condemned was one who was fundamentally responsible for the existence of all injustice - its existence in the mere, but necessary, sense of time, which His will created and prolonged.[1] [My italics]

There is, probably, no other passage in Williams's writings which so firmly sets its face against the dualistic tendencies in Christian theology. But, even if one excises the figure of the devil in the story of man's Fall, the assertion that God is responsible for evil in His creation and for the agony of mankind cannot, without qualification, be regarded as a tenable Christian position. Williams clearly realises this, and he does make qualifications, but his argument - impossible to paraphrase because so much depends on nuance and allusion - is not easily intelligible.[2] It seems that a distinction is drawn between the category of responsibility and that of guilt. While God, as Creator, must be regarded as ultimately responsible for every fact of His creation (and the 'actual schism in reason' is, in this context seen as a fact), it is man who is guilty of the performance of the act which incurred the

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1 The Image of the City, pp.133-134.

2 Alice Hadfield's 'discussion' of the essay in her biography consists almost entirely of quotations from the text.

resulting outrage and agony in his being. Guilt entails consequences, whereas responsibility does not. The ironical situation thus exists in which man is guilty but not responsible and God is responsible but not guilty.[1] The irony is intolerable. God cannot, by the conditions of His creative activity, remove, by Divine fiat, the consequences of the Fall without impairing the free-will of His creatures and making nonsense of the nature of justice. The consequences remain but they can be transfigured into tolerability by the One who was responsible for them. The irony of the situation i.e. that 'life, experience suggests, is a good thing, and somehow unendurable',[2] is transcended by another irony; that of the Cross. A hideous irony exchanged for a glorious one.

> If, obscurely, He would not cease to preserve us in the full horror of existence, at least He shared it. He became as helpless as we under the will which is He. This is the first approach to a sense of justice ... alone among the gods, He deigned to endure the justice He decreed.[3]

In this action the love and the justice of God are reconciled and the burden of man becomes bearable.

But mere tolerability is not enough and, even in his most pessimistic mood, Williams is not content to leave the matter there. Atonement lies at the centre of the Christian life and faith, and a mere death of God, however 'just'; a mere suffering and identification will not work the operation of redemption.[4] He therefore completes the study by introducing

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1 Whether such a distinction is valid in law is a moot point, but it is without doubt some such distinction that Williams has in mind.

2 The Image of the City, p.134.

3 Ibid., p.132.

4 Williams would have violently opposed those modern theologians (e.g. T.J. Altizer in The Gospel of Christian Atheism, 1966) whose claim it seems to be that the death of God is enough.

the concept which links this essay with the rest of his work and especially with the doctrine of Atonement as it is outlined in He Came Down from Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins. The concept is, of course, substitution. In submitting Himself to the decrees of His own justice God, in Christ, does not only identify Himself with Man i.e. show the profoundest sympathy by suffering and dying, He re-creates man, acting decisively by dying for, and instead of, him. And the meaning of the words 'instead of' is here, as everywhere else, quite unambiguous. Man no longer dies because Christ has died in His place.

> He submitted in our stead to the full results of the Law which is He .... By that central substitution, which was the thing added by the Cross to the Incarnation, He became everywhere the centre of, and everywhere He energized and re-affirmed, all our substitutions and exchanges.[1]

The implications of this essay are developed and worked out at the level of ordinary human experience in the last and best of his novels: All Hallows Eve. But two years stretched between 'The Cross' and All Hallows Eve, and in the same year that the essay was printed there appeared what many regard as the greatest of Williams's prose achievements, The Figure of Beatrice.

The Figure of Beatrice.

In the opening chapter of his study in Shakespearian tragedy, The Wheel of Fire, the distinguished critic G. Wilson Knight makes a useful

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1 The Image of the City, p.137.

distinction between 'Criticism' (of a literary work) and 'Interpretation'. The former process involves objectifying the work and the pronouncing of formal judgments about artistic merit and lasting validity. The latter process is one which assumes, without question, worth and validity, and works outward from the interpreter's sympathetic identification with the vision of the artist. 'Criticism is a judgment of vision; interpretation a reconstruction'.[1] The Wheel of Fire is intended as an essay in interpretation. In so far as this distinction can be accepted - and obviously there are areas in which the two activities cannot help overlapping - Williams's 'study in Dante' falls into the same category as The Wheel of Fire. Throughout the book the reader is aware first that Williams's attitude to Dante's poetry and prose, like that of Wilson Knight's to Shakespeare's plays, finds the work 'of so resplendent a quality, so massive a solidity of imagination, that adverse criticism beats against it idly as the wind that flings its ineffectual force against a mountain rock'.[2] And secondly he realises that The Figure of Beatrice 'merges into the work it analyses' to a degree that is never achieved by The Wheel of Fire - fine as that interpretative book is. Williams manages to enter into the imagination of the thirteenth century Italian and to expound, elucidate and develop his themes from a point at the very heart of that poetic vision. Yet the book is far more than a

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1 The Wheel of Fire (University Paperbacks, London, 1960), p.1.

2 Ibid., p.2.

profound and sensitive commentary on Dante, for Williams performs the feat of presenting his own apprehension of the world by increasing our understanding of Dante's. Literary criticism and theology find a perfect union in The Figure of Beatrice. With each successive revelation of the treasures of Dante the reader is led further into the mind of Williams.

In an important way this book must be considered as a continuation and development of the first serious book of literary criticism, The English Poetic Mind, and its title The Figure of Beatrice is of the utmost significance. At its deepest level The English Poetic Mind was a tentative examination of 'the hidden springs of imaginative power'. The questions underlying the essays on Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Tennyson were: where and how does power arise in the life and mind of the poet? In an illuminating paragraph from the introduction to The Figure of Beatrice Williams offers a comparison of Dante and Wordsworth claiming that the source of poetic power in each of them began with, and in, 'a definite and passionate personal experience'.[1] By no means does all poetic activity begin in this way, but some undoubtedly does, and Wordsworth and Dante have this in common. The experience of Wordsworth is identified as, to put it crudely, the experience of Nature: the experience of Dante is a woman - a passionate experience of personal, romantic love. The Prelude is Wordsworth's attempt to identify and explore the meaning of his experience: it is only partially successful.

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1 The Figure of Beatrice, p.13.

All of Dante's works are, according to Williams, a similar attempt at identification and exploration and they are all, each in its own way, brilliantly successful. At the centre of The Banquet as well as The New Life, of the Hell as well as the Paradise is the figure of Beatrice.

Williams is as adamant as the French scholar, Etienne Gilson, on the real existence of a Florentine girl called (or whom Dante chose to call) Beatrice, and on the fact that a Florentine man called Dante Alighieri saw her one day in the streets of the city and fell in love with her. Williams's attitude, like Gilson's, is adopted in opposition to those readers of Dante who would distort The New Life and The Divine Comedy by their rigid allegorisation and determined efforts at 'spiritualising' the events and characters described. They do not object that Beatrice be allegorised as Theology or Divine Grace, or that she be regarded as the poetic symbol of the apprehension of God, so long as what Dante actually said is taken seriously - that Beatrice was a flesh-and-blood reality and that he fell deeply in love with her. There is no intention, on Williams's part, merely to read the works as a rather peculiar biography, but he insists on their being rooted in the material, fleshly world, and to insist on the veracity of the biographical details is to safeguard Dante's doctrine of Creation, Incarnation and Grace.

In dealing with Williams's early poetry the frequency with which the themes of religion and love are woven together was pointed out. In Dante the perfect interweaving of the experience is discovered. The romantic vision is an intimation and an image of the sight of God; the flesh of the beloved becomes an image and a vehicle for the beauty and glory of

its Creator.

> A kind of dreadful perfection has appeared in the streets of Florence; something like the glory of God is walking down the streets towards him.[1]

and

> The image of an awful Origin came down the road; it seemed to hint at a saying of that True Light of which it was a - similitude?[2]

Williams makes it perfectly clear that he does not regard these passages dealing with the romantic vision as hyperbolic; deliberately 'heightened' poetic attempts to engage the attention of the reader and, in so doing, persuade him of the force of the poet's emotion. The emotion is certainly real and present, but Dante is doing more than trying to persuade us of the reality of a subjective state of mind and heart, he is enunciating an exact theology. Strange as it may sound to modern ears, both The New Life and The Divine Comedy are as much theological treatises as they are love poems. This is their glory - religion and love are not to be separated, they explain each other in the total human experience; the love of Beatrice and the love of God belong together. The romantic vision (falling in love) for Dante is responsible for opening the eyes of the lover to the religious truth that the beauty and splendour of God manifest themselves in ways of which the individual is ordinarily oblivious. Williams quotes a famous passage from The New Life:

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1 Ibid., p.20.

2 Ibid., p.68.

> Dico - I tell you when she appeared from any direction, the hope of her admirable greeting abolished in me all enmity, and I was possessed by a flame of charity which compelled me to forgive anyone who had done me an offence; and if any had asked me a question about anything, I should have said only Love! with a countenance full of humility.[1]

Charity, forgiveness, humility - these are the moral effects of the romantic vision, and bound up with them are the metaphysical effects of being made aware of an order and purpose in human life and the realisation that the beauty and splendour of God are to be discovered in the minute particulars of the everyday world and the physical objects of the material creation.

Williams's opposition to the Manichaeist tendencies of Christianity is always closest to the surface of his writing in his discussions of Dante. The spiritual wonder cannot be communicated without the presence of the material vehicle; in this case Beatrice. Dante starts, in The New Life, with the glimpse of a girl in the streets of Florence, and ends, in the closing books of The Divine Comedy, with the vision of the Blessed Trinity. The beginning of the revelation is at a particular point in time with an identifiable sensual experience: the salutation of Beatrice leads to the salvation of Dante. Williams takes up the pun on salutation and salvation and emphasises the connection, thereby attributing to romantic love a value that no other Christian theologian has dared to suggest.

> He who does not merit - Beatrice? say, 'salute', salvation - need not hope to find her. But this is to identify Beatrice

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1 Ibid., p.22.

> with salvation? Yes, and this is the identity of the Image with that beyond the Image. Beatrice is the Image and the foretaste of salvation.[1]

Love for Beatrice exhibits in her a heavenly glory, the true apprehension of which leads inevitably to the true knowledge of God. It is an audacious statement, but it is far from idolatry. And this for a very special reason. The quotation just cited concludes with the sentence: 'This is not proper to say to any but those "ch' avete intelletto d'amore'. What then is this 'intelligence in love' that Williams and Dante speak of? It consists of the ability to discern the true nature of Images.

We have noted before the importance of the concept of the Image in Williams's theology. Much of what Williams believed about the Way of the Affirmation of Images is taken straight from Dante, and he repeats, in greater detail and with firmer emphasis here in The Figure of Beatrice, what he has previously conveyed in poems, plays, novels and essays. Neither Dante nor Williams allow the word 'image' to operate merely as a semantic device. It is never, for instance, used as a convenient method for moralising about human relations. Both suggest that it is insufficient to demand that human beings treat each other 'as if' (and merely 'as if') every other person was Christ Himself; they assert that in a mysterious way each individual is Christ Himself. In the fleshly existence of the other the actual shape of the Divine life can be seen and the presence of God actually communicated. All human beings,

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1 Ibid., p.28.

moreover, are seen to be capable of performing the same function. The Beatrician moment is, paradoxically, an experience both unique and universal: it is unique to each lover but is capable of being apprehended by any human being at any time.[1] By reason of the individual's capacity to operate as an image Williams is able to speak, quite un-selfconsciously, of the 'holy and glorious flesh', so that the reverence which the lover feels in the presence of his beloved, and the adoration which he naturally gives, are quite proper in the religious sense.[2] Though dependent and derived she possesses in herself the glory of the Uncreated. Williams summarises this doctrine of Images in the Introduction.

> But she remained Beatrice right to the end; her derivation was not to obscure her identity any more than her identity should hide her derivation.[3]

This insistence on both the reality of the image and the derived nature of its being is the essence of the Way of Affirmation, and is encapsulated, for Williams in the aphorism, 'This also is Thou; neither is this Thou'.

The true following of the Way, therefore, consists in discovering and accepting the difference between the image and its source. This

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1 'It is every-one's or it is no-one's [the arch-natural experience of the Beatrician moment]; on that there can be no compromise'. The Figure of Beatrice, p.48.

2 In a review of John D. Sinclair's translation and commentary The Divine Comedy. Hell, Purgatory, for Time and Tide (June 24, 1939) he expresses himself more bluntly and comically.

> 'There is Beatrice or - who shall we say - Celia and there is in and all around Celia a glory, and the young man (not being as intellectual or as theological as Dante) says "Oh Celia, I adore you", and Celia in a high gaiety of love says: "O yeah?", or its equivalent. They see each other's mortal nature perfectly clearly, but also the eternal beauty of each other.'

3 The Figure of Beatrice, pp.7-8.

theme is the burden of the Paradise. Dante may not rest content in the re-discovery of Beatrice at the top of the mountain of Purgatory: the romantic vision is not sufficient. Beatrice must lead him to the Uncreated; the romantic sight must be exchanged for, or rather transcended by, the contemplation of God. There is never the faintest suggestion in Dante's work, or in Williams's, that their doctrine of Images is a subtle form of pantheism. The failure to distinguish between the image and its source, the created and the Uncreated, is one of the greatest sins and, if persisted in, entails the loss of true knowledge and consequent damnation. The sin is idolatry: the worship of an unreality; the preference of a passing thrill for the experience of final glory. Both Dante and Williams saw that the situation of every lover was peculiarly attended by this danger. The story of Paolo and Francesca is one in which the failure to bring intelligence and imagination to bear on the romantic vision causes the experience to degenerate into an expression of lust and the indulgence of sentimentality.

Closely connected to the question of image and source is the matter of the relation between existence and function. The failure of Paolo and Francesca was, as well as the failure to distinguish between image and source, a failure to realise that love is not a function which exists for the sake of the lover or the beloved, but a function of which the lover and the beloved are physical embodiments. 'To love is to love and serve the function for which the loved being was created, whatever that may mean or involve; this is the definition of the Way ....'[1] It is

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1 Ibid., p.51.

possible to trace the gradual evolution of this doctrine in Williams's own work. It will be remembered that many of the early poems personify Love in an almost embarrassingly extreme way

> Yet if in very truth such god there be,
> How shall he not reveal himself to me?
> O Love, O love, exalt thyself, O Love.[1]

But what begins as nothing more than an elaborate, imitative poetic conceit gradually takes on a dimension of reality as Williams investigates the nature of love more deeply in the novels, until that scene is reached where Nancy, in The Greater Trumps, suddenly realises that to be 'in love' means to be contained and held by love - possibly literally - to function as one whose purpose is to love. The meaning of the individual existence lies in the function it performs. This principle is not restricted in its operation to the exercise of love, it runs through the entire order of created beings. Every part of the universe exists for the fulfilment of the function for which it was created. Commenting on Dante's exposition and use of the principle Williams writes:

> And there may be quoted here that great sentence which is a governing clause of all his thought: 'Unde est, quod non operatio propria propter essentiam, sed haec propter illam habet ut sit'. 'The proper operation (working or function) is not in existence for the sake of the being, but the being for the sake of the operation ....' This is the primal law of all the images, of whatever kind; they were created for their working and in order to work. Hell is the cessation of work and the leaving of the images to be, without any function, merely themselves.[2]

It would be misleading to call this principle a 'governing clause' of Williams's work too, but it is undoubtedly an important part of his

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1 The second sonnet of The Silver Stair, p.4.

2 The Figure of Beatrice, p.40.

systematic theology; more dominant in certain works than in others, but nearly always present. In, for example, the cycle of Arthurian poems he refers to it over and over again: Arthur, Taliessin, Lancelot (the king, the poet, the lover) are all judged according to the degree to which they recognise and fulfil their function. Normally, however, his use of the idea is less explicit. His belief, for instance, in the hierarchical nature of human society depends, at bottom, on the validity of the principle, though it is nowhere discussed in relation to hierarchy. Because of the principle it is possible for Williams to argue that the city, that ideal state of inter-dependence and co-inherence, is both hierarchical and republican. It can be considered as an equality of beings and a hierarchy of functions. The slightly whimsical essay 'A Dialogue on Hierarchy' is an attempt to work out the paradox in greater detail. There are countless hierarchies just as there are countless functions.

> He who is a good master of his craft in music may do ill enough in the theatre, and the Prime Minister must be docile to an expert scullion. Degree is the inbreathing and outbreathing of joy, but with every breath the joy changes.[1]

Needless to say, Williams finds the ideal 'metaphor' of this conception in Dante's Paradise where the spheres of the redeemed rise above each other rank upon rank, and all is a constantly moving pattern of light. This particular working out of the principle happily satisfies Williams's conviction of the 'mathematical' nature of God's activity, for there is,

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1 The Image of the City, p.128.

at one and the same time, movement and fixity, diversity and unity, change and pattern.

Before leaving Williams's treatment of the twin subjects of Romantic Love and Images in The Figure of Beatrice, it is worth remarking that his whole approach to the themes can be related to his apprehension of the meaning of the Incarnation - though the doctrine itself is never explicitly discussed in the text of the book. I have already tried to show, in the examination of the essays 'Sensuality and Substance' and 'The Index of the Body', that Williams always saw man as the key and explanation, the pattern and blueprint, of the physical universe, not merely its crown and glory. And further, that man achieves his status because, from Eternity, God had ordained to unite Himself with matter in humanity. It was argued that the Incarnation, whatever may have been seen to happen in the processes of what we call Time, 'metaphysically precedes' Creation, that the Incarnation was an act which God could have done to Himself alone, that the Word could have chosen to unite Himself with flesh without bringing the rest of the world into being, but that because of His loving desire to create joy brought the universe into existence with man as the point at which the whole order is substantially joined to its Creator. It is only possible to see the mark of the Creator in the hills and valleys, the rivers and the seas because His mark has already been stamped on the face of man. And the mark on the face of man is the mark of Christ. Humanity reaches its purpose and conclusion in the Incarnation.

It seems that at the centre of Williams's interpretation of the

meaning of the figure of Beatrice is the belief that if an experience of love can really and truthfully be said to grant an insight into the meaning of human nature then the experience must be seen as an intimation of the life of God in man. The lover who is suddenly granted an extraordinary power of perception is, however unconsciously, approaching salvation - a true understanding of the Incarnation, for ultimately the Incarnation is the only explanation of all human experiences. Christ is the explanation of Beatrice's life and Beatrice is the explanation of Dante's life. While it is true that any experience of the world can operate as an image of God, only in the personal quality of a human image can one become aware of the full possibilities of God's revelation because it is only in humanity that God has fully revealed Himself. This doctrine gives Williams's apprehension of Romantic Love its force and theological substance.

Perhaps the most difficult passages in The Figure of Beatrice are those which seek to unify what would normally be considered as separate, though complementary, strands in Dante's work; the idea of the City, and the idea of Beatrice. 'Beatrice and the City are ... inseparate and yet separated ....', '... the girl and the City reflect each other ....'[1] It is not part of the present purpose to pass critical judgment on Williams's reading of Dante in this matter so much as to discover the reason behind this particular concern for such an interpretation. The clue lies somewhere - and it is not possible to be more precise than this - in the notion of co-inherence. Co-inherence is the principle of divine as well as of created life. The City is an image of co-inherence.

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[1] The Figure of Beatrice, p.90.

It is also the public expression of an ideal state of existence reflecting co-inherence of the Trinity and the exchanged life of the Incarnation and of Beatrice who is used by Dante as image of both. The lover has to 'make sense' of the God-bearing image who has entered his life. For Dante and for Williams the sense that is made results in the effort of constructing the City. In the fifth chapter, entitled The Noble Life, Williams asserts that the Beatrician moment cannot remain private, unique as it is to the lover. It challenges nobility, 'valore', into action. The virtues of that nobility are the substance of the life of exchange which is the City: courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, magnanimity, love of honour, mansuetude, affability, truthfulness, pleasantness, justice.[1] There is an analogy between the Incarnation and the figure of Beatrice here. Just as the co-inherence of God and man in Christ instituted the redeemed city for the whole of creation, so the god-bearer, Beatrice, institutes the earthly city for the lover. The vision of love overflows into the desire for exchange. Beatrice and Christ, in their own spheres (the one in poetry, the other in actuality - so to separate them) reveal the principle of all existence natural and supernatural. Of Dante's passage through the second heaven in Paradise Williams says

> Between Beatrice and the emperors is a largesse of smiles; this, in heaven, is the first developed teaching of the Convivio; the girl and the City reflect each other.[2]

The Figure of Beatrice is a study in Dante; it is also a treatise

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1 Ibid., p.75.

2 Ibid., p.199.

on redemption. As Alice Hadfield points out, in earlier works Williams penetrated the mysteries of hell, evil and suffering more deeply and more successfully than those of heaven, goodness and joy. Here in The Figure of Beatrice the idea of heaven dominates the writing and the vision of the transfigured life is communicated with an authority that is second only to Dante's. The book has two centres which, it can be said, co-inhere. The poetic centre is the image of Beatrice - that particular apprehension of love which was the hidden spring of Dante's creative power. The theological centre is the Incarnation - the actual union of heaven and earth, God and man, of which Beatrice is the means of perception and entry. Williams coins the phrase the 'in-Godding' of man. This transfiguration of man's life into the life of God is, for Williams, the true meaning of redemption. In this conception he stands within the tradition of the doctors of the early Church, and to read the closing pages of The Figure of Beatrice is to understand Williams's entire Christology and his preoccupation with the clause of the Athanasian Creed: '... not by conversion of the Godhead into Flesh; but by taking of the Manhood into God.' The strictly Christological sense is extended however, the principle of the Incarnation becomes the method of redemption. Man is 'in-Godded', as God, in the Incarnation, was 'in-fleshed'. Exchange operates even here.

The Final Plays.

In the last three years of his life Williams wrote three plays. The Three Temptations, a play for sound broadcasting, does not warrant

discussion here, and the remaining two, Terror of Light and The House of the Octupus, need not detain us very long. The first of the two, completed at about the same time as the novel All Hallows Eve, is the least satisfactory of all Williams's later pieces. It was substantially revised after its first production, and in his Introduction to the Collected edition of Williams's plays, John Heath-Stubbs states that Williams intended, in time, to versify it. Perhaps only a step as drastic as this could have redeemed it from its present embarrassing state. As it stands, the text is little more than a hotch-potch of empty rodomontade, melodramatic action, and complex theological argument. Heath-Stubbs claims that the play

> draws together, indeed, many of the themes which most deeply preoccupied him, notably in the non-dramatic works.[1]

Many of the themes are, undoubtedly, present, but it is misleading to say that they are 'drawn together' in the play, for there is no unifying idea or organising principle which could force them to work together. They are drawn together only in the rudimentary sense that they inhabit the same structure: the relation between the romantic experience and Christian love, substitution and exchange, the meaning of damnation, the relation of function to being are all themes which are undeniably present, but they are simply heaped on top of each other like the layers of a cake.

It is, perhaps, necessary to draw attention to two aspects of Williams's conception of evil as it is presented in this play. The first

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1 Collected Plays, p.xiii.

is embodied in the figure of the necromancer, Simon Magus. In all his conversations with the apostles; in all his attempts to bribe them and penetrate the secret of their power, it is made quite clear that he is not so much wicked as foolish. We are reminded, once again, of the judgment on Satan in Milton's Paradise Lost. Simon Magus is simply blind to the facts of existence; wrong about the nature of real power and his own ability to wield it. The second aspect is centred upon the figure of Judas Iscariot whom Simon, against his will, has conjured from the dead. Judas's speeches are faintly reminiscent of the speeches in Dante's Hell, and here we are forced to recall Williams's remark in The Figure of Beatrice that in hell images are left to 'be without any function, merely themselves'. A man is made for his function: Judas was made to fulfil the function of an apostle; that fact will never cease to be. In hell he hangs suspended as a man; his apostolate for ever incapable of fulfilment. This is the meaning behind the slightly puzzling lines

> I know my own who live at the bottom of the light
> among the stones. An apostle of Jesus has authority
> among the stones. The Devil himself cannot speak
> the name that I speak because of that authority.[1]

Despite the fact that Judas is spoken of as being in hell, there is a suggestion of universalism in the treatment of his ultimate destiny. Following the speech of Peter, which lays upon Judas the judgment of the Church and 'the compulsion of his own act', there is inserted a short

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1 Ibid., pp.348-349.

speech by Mary Magdalen in which she asks Judas for forgiveness. His reply is evasive and ambiguous.

> I am returning to death; if there is any life anywhere and I find it, I will live.[1]

One cannot imagine any of Dante's condemned souls uttering such words, and it is difficult to know exactly how much importance can be attached to this vague statement of possible salvation for Judas. If this were the only place in Williams's works where universalism was suggested, this speech could be dismissed quite simply as a sentimental slip of the tongue, but there is a passage in The Figure of Beatrice which forces the issue and poses the question: Does a doctrine of co-inherence, pursued to its logical conclusion, necessarily entail a belief in the ultimate salvation of every human soul?

> ... the mysteries of exchange and substitution are very deep, and it might be that in the Mercy, the whole co-inherence of mankind will not be broken. The divine reciprocity is everywhere in love.[2]

Descent Into Hell and He Came Down from Heaven have provided one answer to the question of damnation; in Taliessin Through Logres one of the poems proffers, as we shall see, the opposite.

The House of the Octopus, produced in the last year of Williams's life, has more shape and coherence than Terror of Light and is, thematically both less complicated and less ambitious. But it is unsatisfactory in

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1 Ibid., p.352.

2 The Figure of Beatrice, p.169. But cf. p.113. 'If there is a God, if there is free-will, then man is able to choose the opposite of God.'

other ways, and it is difficult to envisage a successful stage production. Like nearly all of Williams's plays (not perhaps Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury) it is an uneasy blend of naturalism and artificiality. The location of The House of the Octopus pinpoints the weakness. The action of the drama is not 'distanced' enough for the observer to accept the setting as a purely artificial, possibly allegorical, device. We are prepared, for example, to accept the enchanted wood of Comus because Milton perfectly adapts his verse style to the acknowledged and recognisable convention of the masque. But The House of the Octopus is sustained by no such convention and Williams's style, by itself, is not powerful enough to create a convention of its own which would enable the artificial framework to be accepted as an unobtrusive and necessary device. On the other hand, it is equally impossible to accept the 'tropical island' at a naturalistic level. The natives prove to be eloquent rhetoricians, and Williams appears to know very little about mission stations. A further, and perhaps more serious weakness, as John Heath-Stubbs points out, is the dramatist's failure to draw a convincing picture of the nature and force of evil. The representative figure, the Marshal of P'oL'u, is a villain in the tradition of those created by the adolescent imagination of an author like Sapper, and, consequently, is incongruous in a work where theological observation is acute and, in one or two places, profound.

The House of the Octopus belongs with Descent Into Hell and All Hallows Eve in so far as its central concern is the way which the doctrine of substituted love can be acted out in ordinary human situations. In

the play, as in the novels, one is constantly aware of Williams's conviction that substitution is something to be lived out at 'the grass roots' level of life; that it is not a nice metaphysical conceit but the literal description of an action which can be performed, and indeed, must be performed by every human being at some point in his life if salvation is to be achieved. The missionary priest, Anthony, has to accept the strength offered to him by the island girl, Alayn, whom he has previously pitied and dismissed as apostate.

> The Flame. If - as you may yet - you come to the Octopus, will you be content that this girl shall bear your fear? for (make no mistake) you will be afraid deadly afraid. You prayed for strength; here is the answer God sends. Will you take the answer?
>
> Anthony. I am to owe her my own salvation from apostasy?
>
> The Flame. It may be. Will you? [1]

There is a divine irony about the operation of substitution and exchange which commands humility. In the web of exchange individuals suddenly find themselves needing help from those whom they had previously imagined were in need of their help. Every man will find himself indebted to those whom he may have pitied or distrusted, disliked or despised. Like Descent Into Hell and All Hallows Eve, The House of the Octopus emphasises the belief that the barriers set up by space and time which separate natural and supernatural, past and present, the living and the dead, are made ultimately meaningless and unreal by the activity of love in substitution. The web of co-inherence stretches across all barriers to

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[1] Collected Plays, pp.309-310.

include everything that was and is and will be. Pauline Anstruther substitutes herself for her dead ancestor in Descent Into Hell; the dead Lester Furnival for the living Betty Wallingford in All Hallows Eve; and the murdered Alayn for the martyr Anthony in The House of the Octopus.

All Hallows Eve.

Of all the seven novels this last one that Williams wrote immediately before his death has the greatest claim to be evaluated and judged with critical seriousness. Many of the weaknesses of the earlier novels can still be found: the air of hurried production which results, from time to time, in a serious lack of linguistic and imaginative control, the tendency to didacticism, the unrestrained heightening of the sensational, supernatural elements, the melodramatic presentation of the embodiment of evil, and above all the inability to create a whole world of convincing characters. Despite these faults the promise of imaginative power which Descent Into Hell contained is fulfilled in some major areas of All Hallows Eve.

The most significant achievement takes place in precisely that area where Williams has always shown his greatest weakness - characterisation. Admittedly, as had already been indicated, by no means all of the characters 'ring true': it is impossible, for instance, to take either Simon the Clerk or Lady Wallingford seriously; they are 'stick' figures from beginning to end. And at certain moments both Jonathan Drayton and Betty Wallingford are less than convincing. But the three central figures, Lester Furnival, Richard Furnival, and Evelyn Mercer are described

and explored with a closeness of observation and depth of insight which is the more remarkable in that two of them are dead - a fact which, after the initial shock, the reader is prepared to accept without a qualm. The relationship between the dead Loster and her living husband is investigated and developed with a subtlety and restraint that Williams achieved nowhere else. In earlier novels one is always aware of a certain crudity attaching to his presentation of love relationships. (Perhaps the relationship between Isabel and Roger Ingram in Shadows of Ecstasy is the single exception, but it is left undeveloped). It is as though Williams was incapable of writing from within a character he had created, but was concerned only with placing him or her in an elaborate theoretical structure: a preconceived pattern of human relationships. It might be argued that many novelists begin with a pattern and go on to create characters to fit the scheme - Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding could be cited as examples - but somehow the figures must really live and move in the pattern and not merely act as convenient symbols. Many of Williams's creations in all seven of the novels function only as such ciphers: Chloe Burnett, The Duke of North Ridings, Aaron Lee; some hover uncertainly between signification and reality: Isobel Ingram, Lord Argley, Nancy Coningsby; and a few manage to achieve a semblance of fictional 'flesh and blood' reality for a few pages at a time. Lawrence Wentworth and Pauline Anstruther fall into this last category and are, probably, Williams's most successful attempts at characterisation prior to the appearance of All Hallows Eve. But in this final novel we are given three figures, entirely congruous with their fantastic landscape,

who force us to read our own lives in the light of their behaviour and experiences, their reactions to events, their thoughts and feelings. Three persons exist before the novelist's eye - he watches every movement, listens to every word, and in roproducing them embodied something of the truth and complexity of all human life.

All Hallows Eve is, like Dante's Purgatory, a work both sombre and joyful. An apprehension of pain and misery is delicately, but inextricably, woven into a vision of the actual and potential richness and joy of human relationships. The ruling idea is that of purgation: the central theme is that of love. The living as well as the dead inhabit a kind of Purgatory; but a strange kind - one which opens on to the possibility of hell as well as heaven. Lester, Betty, Richard and Evelyn pass through this country which exists at the junction of the two worlds. Two persons are living, two are dead; three persons attain, by a process of painful but joyful purification, to a state of fulfilment, one refuses the proffered grace. In The Figure of Beatrice there is a passage in which Williams, expounding a section from Dante's De Monarchia, speaks of 'all the images ... moving sweetly and strongly into God'.[1] These words convey the burden of All Hallows Eve. The sense of a journey haunts the novel. We are shown the different ways in which Lester, Richard, and Betty embark on that journey, which is the process of moving into God.

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1 The Figure of Beatrice, p.97.

The most striking feature of the book is, undoubtedly, the inter-relation of the two worlds; the living and the dead. The genesis of this idea can be seen in a poem that was discussed in the second chapter: Theobald's Road. The lover waiting for his beloved at a London street corner meditates

> Time has many turnings, and Time and Space
> Multiply infinitely between them and this crowded world.
> By mere chance she, coming out of the house today,
> Just where two were co-incident, entered the other.[1]

We have traced this idea of the inter-penetration of two, or more worlds in the novels Many Dimensions and Descent Into Hell, but despite the partial success of the latter, in neither of these books does the reader so easily accept, or is he so consistently aware of, the close contact between these orders of existence as he is in All Hallows Eve. This is Williams's most sure and subtle development of the theme.

Dorothy Sayers, in an essay which is a short comparative study of Dante and Williams, says in this connection:

> Dante is preoccupied by the inherence of the metaphysical in the physical; Williams - in his novels especially - by the irruption of the metaphysical into the physical.[2]

It is unusual to find so perceptive a critic of Williams making so sweeping, and so misleading, a generalisation. To say that he is preoccupied with the irruption of the metaphysical into the physical is to misconstrue his doctrines of Creation and Incarnation. His belief about the relation

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1 Windows of Night, pp.51-53.

2 Further Papers on Dante, p.200.

of the metaphysical to physical and supernatural to natural is, even in the novels, much more complex than this, and turns on the conviction of co-inherence. Viewed as a whole, his work demonstrates belief in both the irruption of the metaphysical into the physical and the inherence of the one in the other. His whole doctrine of Images, which is the central part of his doctrine of Creation, depends upon the notion of inherence. If the statement 'This also is Thou' is to be taken with the seriousness he constantly recommends, then a belief that the supernatural, after a peculiar manner, is to be found i.e. inheres, in the natural, is imperative. Furthermore, the Incarnation, seen by Williams as the paradigm of God's activity in the world, is discussed by him almost exclusively in terms of the co-inherence of metaphysical and physical. It is true that the novels do paint a picture of a disruption, frequently sudden and violent, of an accepted mode of physical existence by the entrance of a power from another plane. But one cannot overlook the numerous passages which suggest that the ordinary things of the world possess dimensions which cannot be contained within the bounds of the physical universe.

In the fourth chapter of <u>All Hallows Eve</u> Williams conveys his conception of the co-inherence of natural and supernatural by means of the dream-like journey the sleeping girl, Betty, makes through the city which is not the physical London she normally inhabits, but which surrounds, penetrates and, somehow, gives meaning to the city of her waking life. In the scene on the platform of King's Cross railway station there is a direct reminder of the occasion in <u>The Greater Trumps</u> when Nancy Coningsby

perceives the dimension of supernatural, almost divine, power in the figure of the policeman directing the traffic. Here the figure is also giving directions. He is a station porter replying to Betty's question.

> He spoke perhaps from habit, but here habit was full of all its past and all its patience, and its patience was the thunder of the passage of a god dominant, miraculous and yet recurrent. Golden-thighed Endurance, sun-shrouded Justice, were in him, and his face was the deep confluence of the City.[1]

Later in the novel Williams gives an even clearer indication of his apprehension of the presence of the metaphysical in the physical. It occurs towards the end of perhaps the most moving scene in the novel: the scene in which Lester offers herself as a substitute for Betty in the endurance of pain and fear. Recovering from the terrible experience she dreamily remembers her husband's love and the acts of kindness that had issued from it. The plain glass of water had embodied the fullness of his care.

> ... the fact that he was bringing her his own joy to drink ... was a deed of such excelling merit on his part that all the choirs of heaven and birds of earth could never properly sing its praise ....[2]

The whole passage grows out of the little jocular poem To Michal: On Bringing her Breakfast in Bed.[3] Grand, heroic deeds, like Lester's substitutionary action, are all very well, but they are not necessarily more important or significant than the simplest action if it is performed

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1 All Hallows Eve, p.76.

2 Ibid., p.147.

3 Windows of Night, p.44.

in the name of love. Such actions are seen to have eternal significance.

I have said that purgation is the ruling idea of this novel. At the centre of the plot stands the dead girl Lester Furnival, and it is with her purgation that the book is primarily concerned. In life she had known love of a deep and serious kind: her passionate, romantic attachment to her husband Richard. Williams places high value on this experience, but shows that in death she must learn to know love after a different, though not unconnected, manner; the love which is the possession and power of all the citizens of the eternal city, the love which is expressed freely and willingly in the acts of substitution. At one level All Hallows Eve represents no 'advance' on Descent Into Hell. At this level of the personal exchange of burdens, the notion of Lester substituting herself for Betty is no more developed than that of Pauline bearing the pain and fear of her dead ancestor. At another level, however, All Hallows Eve shows a striking development of the doctrine of exchange. Between the publication of Descent Into Hell and the writing of the last novel Williams had produced his essay on the Cross, and in the text of All Hallows Eve we find the insights of that essay, a fully developed doctrine of the Atonement, being integrated into the pattern of the plot and his own theology. The doctrine is one which includes the substitutionary death of Christ. It will be remembered that in the essay Williams had spoken of Christ 'energizing and re-affirming all our substitutions and exchanges'.[1] There is only the

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1 The Image of the City, p.137.

faintest hint of how this may be done in Descent Into Hell; the acts of substitution appear to be performed by the effort of purely human love and courage. But All Hallows Eve is specifically Christian in its vision: the climactic scene of substitution is dominated by the image of the Cross. Lester, unlike Pauline, is incapable of bearing another's pain (Betty's) without the sustaining grace of God. In giving herself for Betty she finds, after the initial shock of agony, that her own suffering is being borne by another agency. In this remarkable scene Williams conveys his perception of the way the Atonement acts decisively at the deepest and most intimate areas of human experience. The Passion and Death of Christ is not an event of the past but an eternal act of Divine Substitution operating at every point of the web of exchange throughout history: where burdens are borne there is Christ to bear them.

> She had been standing, and now she was no longer standing. She was leaning on something, some frame which from her buttocks to her head supported her; indeed she could have believed, but she was not sure, that her arms, flung out on each side held on to a part of the frame, as along a beam of wood .... Between standing and lying, she held and was held .... She pressed herself against that sole support. So those greater than she had come - saints, martyrs, confessors - but they joyously, knowing that this was the first movement of their re-edification in the City ....[1]

The tone of All Hallows Eve is unlike that of any of Williams's other novels; even that of Descent Into Hell which, in other ways, it most closely resembles. Like Dante on the mountain of Purgatory, Williams in this last work of fiction is deeply aware of the extreme frailty of human life, and no other work so finely realises the co-existence of weakness

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1 All Hallows Eve, pp.143-144.

and strength, agony and joy, which remains part of man's condition until beatitude is reached. Although the theme is purgation, the idea of heaven and the achievement of final glory hardly enters into the story. Lester's ultimate separation from the world is not accompanied by the exuberant triumph with which, for instance, the Archdeacon in War in Heaven dies. It is accompanied by an increasing loneliness in the more deeply-felt sense of separation from Richard. Yet the impression left on the reader is not one of gloom and desolation: there is sadness and pain in this parting, but underneath it all there lies the unshakeable conviction that the separation and the loneliness are part of a pattern the meaning of which will ultimately be revealed and experienced as joy and reconciliation. It is a parabolic dying into life. The mountain of Purgatory, like life on earth, is governed by the maxim 'This also is Thou: neither is this Thou'. Lester having learned, on earth, in her love for Richard, the meaning of the first part of the aphorism, learns now, in death, the meaning of the second part. Williams's tone is darker than Dante's, yet his conviction is the same: Beatrice was not the end of Dante's struggle and journey. He has to surrender Beatrice until he is able to receive her back from God, and in God. Lester has to surrender Richard until he can be received back from God. The end of all creation is the direct experience of the life of God.

> Even Richard's figure there had lost its immediate urgency; something once necessary and still infinitely precious, which had belonged to it, now lay deep, beyond all fathoming deep, in the current below, and could be found again only within the current or within the flashing rain.[1]

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[1] Ibid., p.226.

Christianity being a religion which revolves around man's estrangement from God and his reconciliation to Him in the Person of Jesus Christ has the doctrines of Incarnation and Atonement at its centre. In consequence a man's distinctive religious sensibility is determined by the ways in which these doctrines are apprehended and interpreted. At the risk of over-simplifying, I would suggest that Williams's full understanding of the Incarnation can be found in The Figure of Beatrice and that his profoundest interpretation of the Atonement is expressed in All Hallows Eve. Taken together, they provide the full range and depth of his sensibility. The distinction between the two books is, in a sense, an artificial one because Williams, essentially, does not separate the two doctrines. But their emphases are different, and read as complementary studies they demonstrate a religious sensibility comprehensive in its understanding and original in its approach.

CHAPTER VI

'TALIESSIN THROUGH LOGRES' AND 'THE REGION OF THE SUMMER STARS'

The reasons for deferring discussion of the two Arthurian cycles to this point have already been outlined. In turning to Williams's mature poetry it is necessary to draw attention, not merely to a development in style, but to the pronounced contrast between the early volumes and the two cycles. This revolution presents difficult but fascinating problems to the literary critic, and those few critics who have addressed themselves to the question have failed to find a satisfactory answer.[1] The contrast between the early and late poetry is too obvious to warrant a detailed description: the simple exercise of placing one of the poems from, for example, Windows of Night (1924) side by side with any extract from Taliessin Through Logres (1938) makes the point immediately. Fourteen years separate these two volumes - a silence broken by only one book of verse Heroes and Kings (1930). This volume lies midway between the first and second periods of Williams's work, but does little to help in solving the riddle of the contrast.

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1 Anne Ridler's attempt to account for the change in her introduction to The Image of the City seems to me to be by far the most penetrating explanation, but she admits to being puzzled by the phenomenon.

Clearly, it belongs with the early verse, but, as has already been noted, it introduces Arthurian themes and characters, and in a few, isolated, passages hints faintly at a changing attitude to rhythm and intonation.

Up to the publication of Heroes and Kings Williams seems, almost deliberately, to have been ignoring the poetic climate of the twentieth century. However original the themes of the early poems may be, most of the poetry remains stuck at the level of doggerel. This is partly explained by the obtuse archaism of his attitudes. The diction and rhythms, colours and intonation are, almost invariably, derived from nineteenth century models: Victorian hymns, refrains of Morris, Swinburne's sonnets, Chesterton's ballads. Every poet must, of necessity, find his own 'voice', and Williams clearly had not found his when he wrote his first five volumes - the 'voice' of these poems is a tinny imitation of a host of voices from earlier centuries. He was fifty years old before he spoke in distinctive tones, and, oddly enough, this discovery - the abandonment of the earlier poetic manner and the achievement of a personal style - had the effect, not of drawing him closer to his contemporaries, but of isolating him completely. The oblique, imagistic techniques of Eliot and Pound are utterly foreign to Williams, and he shows no affinity to either those writers whose work, immensely popular in the first few decades of this century, was labelled Georgian poetry, nor to the younger men clustering around the figures of Auden, Spender, Day Lewis, and MacNeice. The Arthurian sequence is a 'maverick'; it bears no relation to any of the identifiable poetic movements of the twentieth century.

Fifty years earlier a similar position, in relation to the Victorian Zeitgeist, had been occupied by Gerard Manley Hopkins. The introduction of Hopkins into this discussion is not gratuitous for there exists between Williams and Hopkins a closer bond than that of a similar isolation from their immediate environment.

In 1930 (the year of Heroes and Kings) Williams edited, with a critical introduction, the second edition of Gerard Manley Hopkins's poems. By this date the work of the Victorian poet was still virtually unknown. Robert Bridges, who had been appointed literary executor on Hopkins's death, had withheld the publication of his friend's manuscripts for twenty-eight years, and it was not until the end of the First World War, in 1918, that he allowed a complete edition to appear: an edition, incidentally, to which he contributed a short-sighted and somewhat disparaging Preface. The poems received scant attention in literary circles until the sensitive appraisal of I.A. Richards appeared in The Dial in September, 1926. Williams's own critique in the Introduction to the second edition is a curious affair. While appreciative and vigorously written, it does not show Williams at his most perspicacious. The concept of Contradiction (which was discussed in a previous chapter) seems already to have gained a strong hold on his mind, and he interprets much of Hopkins's work in the light of it. The result is some seriously distorted critical judgments. He likens Hopkins, for instance, to Milton: an approach that was treated with justifiable asperity by F.R. Leavis two years later.[1] The 'error' of Williams's assertion is, however,

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1 F.R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry, Ch.V (Peregrine Books 1963), p.137.

not our present concern; the fact of the assertion is. That Williams could have placed Hopkins so confidently in the company of a poet whom he so greatly revered reveals a good deal about the esteem in which he held the Victorian. More significant still is the fact that a good third of Williams's introduction is devoted to a detailed study of Hopkins's prosody, and it is in Hopkins's work that, I believe, a key to the enigma of Williams's development can be found.

It is illuminating to compare the creative careers of Hopkins and Williams, for, placed side by side, they show, in some areas, remarkable similarities. In Hopkins's life, as in Williams's, an abrupt halt in poetic output is followed by a silence the outcome of which is the production of a poetry radically different from what had previously appeared. Hopkins's early poems are, at best, conventional verses echoing the sounds of Pre-Raphaelitism, and, at worst, doggeral almost as uninspired as some of Williams's.

> 'The Rose in a mystery' - where is it found?
> Is it anything true? Does it grow upon ground?
> It was made of earth's mould, but it went from men's eyes,
> And its place is a secret, and shut in the skies.
> In the Gardens of God, in the daylight divine
> Find me a place by thee, Mother of mine.[1]

On his entry into the Society of Jesus in 1868 he stopped writing poetry in the belief that it was incompatible with his vocation, and, in an excess of misdirected zeal, he destroyed (he thought) all his work. However, he continued to keep a Journal, and the entries over the years

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1 'Rose Mystica'. Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (Second edition, London, 1930), pp.50-52.

following 1863 show the steady evolution of an aesthetic that was to govern his creative efforts for the rest of his life.[1] The poetic silence that was kept for nearly eight years was broken with the publication in 1876 of one of the most remarkable poems in the English language, The Wreck of the Deutschland - a work whose form bears no resemblance to the poetic movements of the nineteenth century and very little relation to his own earlier creations.

Williams included twenty-two pages of notes by Hopkins's first editor, Bridges, in his own edition of Hopkins's poems. In the note on Heraclitean Fire Bridges quotes an interesting statement by Hopkins on the question of 'influence'. 'The effect of studying masterpieces is to make me admire and do otherwise. So it must be on every artist to some degree, on me to a marked degree.'[2] One is led to wonder, in the light of this quotation, whether Williams was aware of the extent to which his study of Hopkins was affecting the formation of his own style. Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars owe more to Hopkins than to any other poet. Williams might have had more admiration for the masterpieces of Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth, but it was the prosody of Hopkins that supplied him with the necessary instruments for the fashioning of his own poetry.

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1 Williams, so far as is known, did not keep a journal, but Anne Ridler possesses a Commonplace book in which some indication of the evolution of the Arthurian cycle is shown.

2 p.118.

Anne Ridler comments on the connection between the style of Hopkins and that of Williams in the following way:

> He took from Hopkins, for one thing, a habit of rhythm, of breaking up a statement into short segments linked by rhyme and by period stresses, which Hopkins had adopted from early English poetry.[1]

Superficially these remarks may not seem to give strong support to my view of the intimate relation between Hopkins and Williams; 'a habit of rhythm' hardly seems to suggest a profound influence. Yet, in the realm of poetry, this particular feature of style, rhythm, can be of crucial importance. It is necessary in this context to recall the argument on the subject of metre in the Biographia Literaria of Coleridge. When Coleridge refers to metre as 'the proper form of poetry'[2] the word 'form' must be understood in its full seriousness: as something giving shape and apprehensibility to an otherwise amorphous and incomprehensible mass. For Coleridge 'metre' is the essential mark of a poem, and he develops his argument by saying that it

> ... resembles (if the aptness of the simile may excuse its meanness) yeast, worthless or disagreeable by itself, but giving vivacity and spirit to the liquor with which it is proportionally combined.[3]

It should be noticed that the remarks are confined to the subject of 'metre'. Rhythm is a more complicated idea - possibly a combination of Coleridge's concepts of metre and rhyme. It involves more than the number of syllables in a line of verse or its musical 'beat', and covers

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1 The Image of the City, p.lxi.

2 Biographia Literaria (Everyman edition, 1956), p.211.

3 Ibid., p.208.

the subtler problems of the juxtaposition of longer and shorter vowels; of light and dark sounds; the placing of stresses and accentuation. Consequently it is possible to find utterly distinct rhythms operating within any of the conventional poetic forms. (It is not merely the difference of vocabulary and imagery which makes the heroic couplet of Pope different from that of Auden, it is also a habit of rhythm). As the poetry of Hopkins so clearly demonstrates, the discovery of a distinctive rhythm is thus the discovery of a distinctive poetic persona.

If it is true that Williams learned from Hopkins, not only the use of an unconventional form, but a technique of rhythm, it might suggest that he did nothing more than adopt the persona of Hopkins and imitate his voice. A short comparative exercise may help to illustrate both the debt that Williams owes to Hopkins and also the quality of his own originality. The Bugler's First Communion is not the finest of Hopkins's creations, but it demonstrates the characteristic aspects of his work admirably. The third and fourth stanzas run as follows:

> Here he knelt then in regimental red.
> Forth Christ from cupboard fetched, how fain I of feet
> To his youngster take his treat!
> Low-latched in leaf-light housel his too huge godhead.
>
> There! And your sweetest soudings, ah divine,
> By it, heavens, befall him! as a heart Christ's darling,
> dauntless;
> Tongue, true, vaunt - and tauntless;
> Breathing bloom of a chastity in manner fine.[1]

The Crowning of Arthur is, contrariwise, among Williams's finest creations;

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1 Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, p.86.

it is also a poem which clearly approximates to the style of Hopkins.

The first and second stanzas run as follows:

> The king stood crowned; around in the gate,
> midnight striking, torches and fires
> massing the colour, casting the metal,
> furnace of jubilee, through time and town,
> Logres heraldically flaunted the king's state.
>
> The lords sheathed their swords; they camped
> by Camelot's wall; thick-tossed torches,
> tall candles flared, opened deployed;
> between them rose the beasts of the banners;
> flaring over all the king's dragon ramped.[1]

The stylistic similarities are too obvious to require detailed examination; the absence of a regular metrical beat (i.e. a line arranged, conventionally, in feet) and the bold use of homophones and heavily-stressed syllables in close proximity to each other (Williams's line in this poem is more emphatic than Hopkins's); the almost ostentatious use of rhetorical devices like alliteration, half-rhyme and assonance; the occasional violent dislocation of grammar and syntax; the use of the compound epithet; the flagrant artificiality of language - as if to distinguish it as far as possible from normal prose and speech patterns. By these means both poets achieve, to an extraordinarily high degree, a quality of 'compression'. Yet, despite the evident similarities, the two poems are strikingly different in the effects they produce. The difference grown out of, what can only be called, a difference of imaginative sensibility, and this difference immunises Williams against any accusation of mere imitation.

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1 Taliessin Through Logres, p.19.

Whereas the stanzas of Hopkins contain a richness and density of texture and an urgency of emotion, Williams's lines glitter with a surface brilliance and convey an impression, not of deeply-felt emotion but of tightly-packed thought. Hopkins's poetry is a remarkable blend of the 'object' sensuously perceived and the poet's apprehension of its (hidden) meaning for himself. The boy at the communion rail is vividly and concretely present in words and rhythms whose purpose is not primarily the recreation of a scene in a church, but the communication of a personal religious vision of the world. So the boy exists as an image in two senses: he is the 'object' physically perceived in which the vision is apprehended by the poet, and the poetic conceit by which the vision is communicated to others.

The Crowning of Arthur is one of Williams's most sensuously immediate poems, yet even here the physical existence of the events described is not conveyed in the way Hopkins invariably conveys it - nor, perhaps, is intended, for Williams is an 'intellectual' poet in a way that Hopkins never tried to be. Every creative effort of the Victorian poet was governed by concepts which were forged during the years of his poetic silence - 'inscape' and 'instress'. For Hopkins every poem had to embody the inward pattern of the thing observed; but the pattern could be discerned only by the closest examination and deepest awareness of the thing itself. Consequently his images have a substantiality and, almost, a self-generating vitality that is rare in English verse. For Williams, on the other hand, a poem tends to be a ritual or a game; an arrangement of 'things observed' in accordance with a preconceived intellectual

design. The result is that his images frequently operate only at the level of conventional symbols. Like heraldic devices, however colourful and strange their appearance, they insistently point away from themselves to the meaning they are intended to convey. The opening stanzas of The Crowning of Arthur do not provide us with the best illustration of this point, yet even here the scene, vivid in its own peculiar way, is remote from physical life and movement. The words embody an idea of triumphant splendour rather than the splendour itself. The reader is at two removes from the 'object': the stanzas are, as it were, a word-picture of a tapestry scene in which the actions and movements have already been frozen into a pattern of ritual gesture.

Williams is a philosophical poet in the same sense that Dante and Milton were: the Arthurian cycles, like The Divine Comedy and Paradise Lost, are dominated by certain controlling theological ideas. Robert Conquest and Roger Sale have criticised the Arthurian poems adversely precisely for this reason. Conquest's criticism, contained in an article written in 1957, is an interesting but perverse piece of argumentation. The author admits Williams's power as a poet but insists on finding a similarity between the poems and totalitarian thought.

> The characteristic failure of totalitarian thought is perhaps that the particular is treated merely as a representative of the general, an aspect of a 'higher' ordained process. In Dante, for instance - who might be put up as a defence by Williams - one does not feel this absolute subordination of detail to theme.[1]

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1 Essays in Criticism, Vol.7 (1957), p.43.

As a describer of Williams's poems Conquest is accurate enough, but his critical evaluation is at fault. Admittedly, each particular (individual image) in a poem must possess its own life and evocative power, but there is no reason why it should not be treated primarily as a representation of the general, and The Divine Comedy exhibits, more clearly than any other work in European literature, an 'absolute subordination of detail to theme'. It is not in this area - the intended relation of parts to the whole - that Williams's failure lies, for then we might suppose that Dante and Milton also failed; it is in the area of imaginative power; at the level of the individual image. Unlike his great predecessors, Williams possessed insufficient ability to give imaginative realisation to his intellectual concepts. Roger Sale's article, written in 1964, despite its hysterical tone, comes closer to the heart of the matter when it refers to Williams's poetic images as 'icons'.

> Williams then, uses his symbols as icons ... it is the promise of the imagination to make me understand that a thing is so regardless of what I personally believe .... But an icon ... is not meant to be understood imaginatively; it is only a reminder of a truth already believed in.
>
> But in iconography the final justification rests not in the image but in the system of which it is a part. The clarity of Williams's imagery is really a sham; only the system is clear.

In comparison to Williams, T.S. Eliot

> teases his reader in and out of belief, in and out of time, in and out of the stifling clarity of iconography.[1]

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1 The Hudson Review, Vol. XVII, pp.212, 213, & 215 resp.

Although Sale's distinction between 'expressive image' and 'icon' is improperly sharp, the point he is making is simple and justifiable: that it is impossible to take an abstract system of ideas, deck it out in the finery of metre and metaphor, and expect it to act as poetry. Images must be allowed to speak for themselves and the reader should not have to be told their meaning. If one needs a key to unlock their meaning they have failed as a means of poetic communication. The following extract from Lamorack and the Queen Morgause of Orkney remains opaque until one has learned, from external sources, what Williams intends in the images of 'hazel', 'contingent shapes' and the Emperor's 'knowledge'.

> I remembered how the archbishop in Caerleon at a feast
> preached that before the making of man or beast
> the Emperor knew all carved contingent shapes
> in torrid marsh temples or on cold crookt capes.
>
> These were the shapes only the Emperor knew
> unless Coelius Vibenna and his loathly few,
> squat by their pot, by the twisted hazel art
> sought by the image of that image within their heart.[1]

But Sale's article is far from being a satisfactory critique. It is an acrimonious and, frequently, silly attack, not only on Williams, but on C.S. Lewis and his interpretation of the Arthurian poems in the book Arthurian Torso. It is true that Lewis's attempt to defend the poems (a very small part of the book) leaves something to be desired - but this was not the prime purpose of the commentary - nonetheless he makes the important point (which Conquest, to give him his due, also

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1 Taliessin, p.39.

acknowledges) that Williams is capable of producing powerfully moving imagery, and that it has the peculiar flavour of a 'romantic image' used in a 'metaphysical way'.[1] This is a method of image-making - a sensuous description intended to suggest a complex intellectual pattern - which Sale refuses to countenance as valid.

> The darkened glamour of the golden-work
> took colour from each line;
> dimly the gazing postulants saw
> patterns of multilinear red
> sprinkled and spreading everywhere,
> and spaced to one design.[2]

There is no place in this study of Williams for a close examination of the artistry of his poetry. Suffice it to say that a fair evaluation will be achieved only when it is recognised that the poems contain a bewildering variety of types of imagery: that they are a complicated and irritating mixture of icons, symbols, expressive images, and sensuous representations.

Williams's mature poems are undeniably difficult and much of their obscurity lies in the choice and presentation of their controlling myth - King Arthur and the Quest for the Holy Grail. The first question to be faced is the one which offers the least satisfactory answer. Why did Williams choose a myth as the framework and subject for the whole of his later poetry? The writing of epic and narrative poetry, let alone on

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1 *Arthurian Torso*, p.198. Cf. Anne Ridler's remark that Williams's poetry 'creates its own sense world'. (*The Image of the City*, p.lxvi).

2 'Taliessin in the School of the Poets'. *Taliessin*, p.27.

mythological themes, had passed out of the mainstream of the English poetic tradition by the beginning of the twentieth century. But then, of course, Williams's thirty-two lyrics, strictly speaking, constitute neither an epic nor a narrative poem. There is no sequence of events running through the two volumes, nor is there any systematic arrangement of the poems themselves. Each poem (as regards its narrative value) can be read and understood in complete isolation. To read The Calling of Arthur before The Founding of the Company or The Departure of Merlin is to take 'events' in the correct order, but does little to help the reader enter Williams's poetic world.[1] Anne Ridler believes that it was Williams's original intention to compose an epic (though the jottings in his Commonplace book give no proof of this), but discovered in the years he spent labouring over Taliessin Through Logres that a number of separate lyrics clustered around the ancient story suited his purpose better.

A pointer to the answering of this first question can perhaps be found in the, now famous, comment made by T.S. Eliot in the course of his review of James Joyce's novel Ulysses in 1926. In the hands of the modern artist, he maintained, myth could be seen as

> ... a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.[2]

Whether Williams regarded 'contemporary history' in this way or not is an open question and does not require investigation here. The point is

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1 C.S. Lewis makes an attempt, in Arthurian Torso, to arrange the poems in a narrative order.

2 Quoted by Moorman in Arthurian Triptych.

that a myth, in itself, is a coherent literary embodiment of a complicated system of beliefs, attitudes and ritual actions, and that, in relation to literature, it can provide a ready-made means of achieving unity of structure, of imposing comprehensible order and pattern on diverse material. Williams, with his own passion for integrated design and perceptible order, realised the possibility of drawing together a number of separate themes and making them cohere by relating them to a single pattern of events - a folk-legend. There is, thus, always an identifiable point of reference in the cycles; the poems achieve their unity, not merely by a continuity of style, but by the relation each bears to the untold, but accepted, series of actions and occurrences which constitute the Arthurian saga.

The second question now arises: the reason for Williams's choice of this particular myth. Clearly, any myth can perform the same general function of imposing shape and achieving unity, but each legend will set its own limits according to its own internal structure - myth is a master as well as a servant - and Williams found the legends of Arthur and the Holy Grail peculiarly conducive to the forceful presentation of his own poetic vision. In the first place he was simply 'at home' in them. It must be recognised that for all his breadth of learning he was never a 'European' in the way that Eliot and Pound were. Apart from his intense love for and understanding of the work of Dante he seems to have spent little time among the classics of European literature. Although he did not identify himself with a national culture as did W.B. Yeats, he resembles Yeats in the respect that he draws strength and receives

inspiration from the tales and traditions of his own country. But England, in comparison to Ireland, is poorly endowed with folk-lore and the only living and powerful legend in English life is the British myth of King Arthur.

It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the sources of the Arthurian stories or to calculate precisely the influence that particular documents might have exercised over Williams's own interpretation of the myth, but some general points have to be made. It is evident from Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars - and the posthumous prose fragment The Figure of Arthur leaves us in no doubt - that Williams's framework is the late Medieval narrative in which two strands - originally two distinct legends - have been woven together. There is first the original British tradition of Arthur referred to, possibly by Gildas, (c.504) certainly by Nennius in Historia Britonum (c.800) and mentioned in the Annals of Wales (c.950). R.S. Loomis safely concludes that

> ... the Matter of Britain originated in the blending of historic reminiscences of a British battle-leader with a highly fanciful mythological tradition going back to pagan times.[1]

These scattered references achieve consecutive narrative form in the mendacious Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth (c.1150) and in the curious pot-pourri of folk-lore and fairy tale known as the Mabinogion stories. It is worth noting that the bard Taliessin ('bright-

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1 The Development of the Arthurian Romance (London, 1963), p.21.

forehead') makes his first appearance in this Welsh collection. None of these accounts carries any mention of the Holy Grail.

The origins of the legend of the Grail and its Quest are even more obscure than those of Arthur and his kingdom and this study is not the place for a comprehensive survey of its genesis in history and legend. As a religious symbol, a cultic object, the sacred vessel - sometimes identified as a cup, sometimes a dish, and frequently as a stone - is to be found in Christian and pagan mythologies alike. The ways in which the symbol is interpreted are as diverse as the cults themselves though the idea of spiritual regeneration is present in nearly all of them.[1] As a story it makes its appearance, similarly, in a variety of forms throughout the history of Western Europe. In the romances of Chretien de Troyes (c.1170) we find the beginnings of a process of conflation of sources, and a narrative framework being provided for the legends. The unfinished narrative 'Perceval' or Conte del Graal introduces the theme of the knightly quest. This process of conflation is furthered in the short prose cycle of Robert de Borron (c.1200), and flowers magnificently in the five prose poems of the thirteenth century that have become known as the Vulgate cycle. This last collection is of importance, not only because it is dominated by the idea of the Grail, but also because it introduces Lancelot as a principal figure in the Arthurian drama.[2]

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Cf. R.S. Loomis, The Grail from Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol (1963).
A.C.L. Brown, The Origins of the Grail Legend (1943).
Jessie L. Weston, From Ritual to Romance (1920).

2
Cf. Williams's own discussion in Arthurian Torso, Chs. IV & V.

Romances in prose and verse flourished in the late Middle Ages - R.S. Loomis emmerates sixteen written in Middle English dialects alone - but the most refined and orderly account came towards the close of the Middle Ages in the sixteenth century prose cycle of Sir Thomas Malory.[1] Malory's work has dominated the English imagination since that time; it provided the inspiration for the numerous nineteenth century reconstructions of the legend, and it is primarily his re-working of the stories (though not his interpretation of them) that Williams follows.[2]

We should not overlook the fact that Williams could not help but see the stories through the eyes of Morris, Swinburne and Tennyson as well as through those of Malory. This fact is recognised by R.W. Barber in his historical survey of the growth of Arthurian literature, but Barber fails to notice the extent to which Williams reacted to the false medievalism of the nineteenth century and to the 'false' interpretations of the poets.[3] Consequently, he praises Taliessin Through Logres and

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1 R.S. Loomis, The Development of Arthurian Romance, Chs.10 and 11.

2 Cf. Williams's essay 'Malory and the Grail Legend'.
> 'But it is, of course, in prose rather than in verse that the thing has remained for us in English; it is in Malory, and in Sebastian Evans's translation of a part of Chretien's Perceval under the title of the High History of the Holy Grail. The latter book is a very noble piece of work. But it is, as it were, a detail; the whole grand Myth - or at least much of it - is in Malory.'
> The Image of the City, p.187.

3 'There are a number of texts, even without involving those of the Middle Ages. They occur mostly in the Victorian poets - Hawker, Morris, Tennyson, Swinburne - and they are mostly unsatisfactory. There is, however, no need to explain this by dragging in religion; it is much more easily and truly explained by saying that none of these poets had the full capacity of the mythical imagination.'
('Malory and the Grail Legend') The Image of the City, pp.186-187.

The Region of the Summer Stars in terms which Williams himself would hardly have approved or considered appropriate.

> Yet in its obscure and mystical way this is one of the great works of Arthurian literature. It is a heightening of Tennyson's symbolism to the utmost, the spiritual application of Swinburne's intense study of physical love in the frame of a legend. When we are more used to such poetry - for whatever may be claimed, such works, are scarcely accepted and understood as yet - then Williams will come into his own.[1]

Much as Williams admired Tennyson, his strictures on Tennyson's presentation of the Arthuriad are fierce.

> ... the Idylls of the King are hampered all through by a lack of poetic intellect. They are muddled and they are afraid - and both in the legend of the Grail .... Lancelot's cry is one of the most real things in Tennyson .... But it is answered by one of the most formal things in Tennyson's poetry. Arthur simply denies it ....[2]

Williams's treatment of both the Grail theme and that of physical love owes nothing to the ideas of Tennyson or Swinburne. If debts are to be reckoned, then he owes a few to certain traditions of courtly love, but most of them to Dante.

It is perhaps necessary, at this point, to say that, in the composition of his own cycles, it is the story of Arthur that is uppermost in Williams's mind: the legends of the Grail enter the picture because they form part of the inherited tradition of Arthurian literature. This

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1 Arthur of Albion (London, 1961), p.182.

2 The English Poetic Mind, p.190. He had made a similar point three years before this comment in his essay on Victorian narrative verse. (An introduction to a selection in 1927)

> The weakness therefore of the Victorian age, as of the Idylls, is not its concern with conduct but its failure artistically to suggest an adequate significance in conduct.
>
> The Image of the City, p.3.

does not mean that he had no interest in the Grail itself (the novel War in Heaven provides evidence of some kind of interest), but as an object in its own right it has no place in the poems. Throughout the sequence interest is centred, not on what the vessel is in itself, but upon the achievement of the Grail, i.e. the knightly quest. The long chapter in Arthurian Torso, 'The Coming of the Grail', demonstrates the balance of Williams's concerns. There is no investigation into the origins of the Grail in cultic practice. It is a study of the Grail's presence in the Christian West as a poetic centre: as an artistic rather than as a religious symbol. For his own purpose he is content to accept the Eucharistic connotations the symbol has gathered and leave the matter there.[1] It is part of the framework of the narrative, its intrinsic meaning is taken for granted.

It is not my intention to provide a critical commentary on the thirty-two lyrics which constitute Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars: C.S. Lewis has provided an admirable one in his edition of The Figure of Arthur. (His study is called Williams and the Arthuriad and constitutes the second half of the volume Arthurian Torso.) Instead I shall try to indicate the way in which the dominant theological motifs we have already examined are embodied and presented here in poetic

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'Something perhaps should be said - and may be said here as well as anywhere - about those fabulous vessels, which from Celtic or whatever sources, emerged into general knowledge. There has been much controversy about them - vessels of plenty and cauldrons of magic - and they have been supposed by learned experts to be the origin of the Grail myth. That, in the Scriptural and ecclesiastical sense, they certainly cannot be. Cup or dish or container of whatever kind, the Grail in its origin entered Europe with the Christian and Catholic Faith.'

Arthurian Torso, pp.22-23.

form. I am aware that, from the point of view of the literary critic, this is to start at the wrong end, and that violence can easily be done to the poetry itself in the employment of this method, but the purpose of this study is not literary criticism, it is the exploration of Williams's pattern of theological thinking.

Creation and Incarnation.

Every volume of the first edition of Taliessin Through Logres was printed with a curious set of end-papers.[1] Superimposed on a sketch-map of Europe is the rough drawing of a naked woman reclining on her side. Her right elbow rests in Spain, her head in Britain, her breasts in Gaul; her hands clasp one another at Rome; the circle of her buttocks contains Caucasia; her navel is located at Byzantium, the genital parts at Jerusalem, and her legs disappear off the map into the gulf of Arabia. According to Alice Hadfield it was not part of Williams's original intention to accompany the twenty-four poems with a drawing of this kind, but he recognised, when it was shown to him, that it might serve a useful function in helping to clarify certain obscure allusions and act as a guide through the text.[2] The whole sequence is united and controlled in two ways. There is, first, the mythological framework: the legend of Arthur and the Holy Grail which binds the poems together by means of narrative. There is, secondly, the symbolic centre, or, what might be

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1 All later editions were printed without these end-papers.

2 Hadfield, p.146.

called the controlling image - the human body - of which the end-papers provide the diagram. The Empire (Europe), the landscape of these poems, is identified allegorically with the human figure: part to part.[1] Just as the poems are bound together by their narrative framework, so they are united by the constant presence of the central image. But the body is more than a convenient allegory; its use as an image is not merely a way of giving imaginative coherence to disparate themes, it introduces the reader into the heart of Williams's theology.

In the essay 'The Index of the Body' Williams wrote: 'The Sacred Body is the plan upon which physical human creation was built, for it is the centre of physical human creation.'[2] The essay appeared in July, 1942, but three years earlier he had published a poetic embodiment of that doctrine in the sequence Taliessin Through Logres. The vision of the Taliessin poems is wider than that of the quotation; in the volume the poet pictures, not merely human physical creation built upon the plan of the Sacred Body, but the whole of the physical world. Throughout the cycle the anatomical design of the reclining figure 'explains' the world of the Empire. The third poem of the collection, The Vision of the Empire, provides the most easily accessible, as well as the most extended exposition of the doctrine. Stanza by stanza Williams spins the allegory out: each geographical region of the Empire is identified with

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Cf. 'Notes on the Arthurian Myth'.

> The Empire then is (a) all Creation - with the legothetes and what not as angels and such - (b) Unfallen Man; (c) a proper social order; (d) the true physical body.
>
> The Image of the City, p.178.

2

The Image of the City, p.86.

a specific area of the human body. Heavy stress is laid upon the complex organic unity and complete interdependence of the component parts. However, the more closely one reads the poem, the more one becomes aware that it is not merely as a literary device that the anatomy is functioning. In the mind of the poet the connection between the Empire and the body is much closer than that of allegory. The intimate relation between the universe and the human body exists outside the realms of Art - in real life; it is an organic and metaphysical connection. This is the aspect in which the two centres of the sequence differ from one another. As far as the mythological framework is concerned, it is conceivable that another narrative might just as easily have fulfilled the author's intentions; that choice is, in a real sense, arbitrary. The choice of the controlling image is not. For Williams no other symbol could have replaced the human body as the mirror of the universe and the touchstone of reality.

In The Vision of the Empire there is the recurring refrain, 'The organic body sang together', and the, somewhat over-written, concluding stanza:

> O you shoulders, elbows, wrists,
> bless him, praise him, magnify him for ever;
> you fittings of thumbs and fingers,
> bless ye the Lord;
> Sockets and balls in knees and ankles,
> bless ye the Lord;[1]

both of which point forward directly (as do the end-papers) to Williams's

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1 Taliessin, pp.12-13.

comments (so extensive as to amount almost to an exposition) on the ancient science of Astrology in 'The Index of the Body'.

> The signs of the Zodiac were, according to some students, related to the parts of the physical body ... in one pattern, the house of the Water-carrier was referred to the eyes; the house of the Twins to the arms and hands; the house of the Scorpion to the privy parts and the sexual organs; and the house of the Balances to the buttocks .... It will be clear also that in such a poetic (so to call it) imagination, we are dealing with a kind of macrocosmic - microcosmic union of a more serious kind than the mere exposition by a debased astrology of chances in a man's personal life ... the houses of the Zodiac ... may be but the fables of astronomy .... But they are not unworthy fables. They direct attention to the principles at work both in the spatial heavens and the structure of man's body.[1]

Thus every human figure is seen as a microcosm of the world; it holds within its complex organisation the secrets of the universe and reveals them to those who regard it with the proper degree of seriousness. The ordinary human body however, is but the image, say, the miniature projection, of the Sacred Body of the Incarnate Lord. In that Body, the Incarnation, all secrets of life are stored. For Williams that point is the beginning and the end of existence, and what he expresses in his poetry and speaks of in his essays[2] is but the logical extension and a different aspect of his belief that the Incarnation of Divinity in the historical, fleshly person Jesus Christ was necessitated, neither by the Fall of man nor yet by the act of Creation, but by the inner nature of God's own being which ordained that joy, the joy of exchange, be known 'after this manner also'.

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1 The Image of the City, p.83.

2 Cf. The essay 'Natural Goodness'. The Image of the City, pp.75-80.

In her introduction to The Image of the City Anne Hidler, in this connection, quotes, singularly appropriately, from Kenneth Clark's study in art history and criticism The Nude.

> we still feel close to divinity in those flashes of self-identification when, through our own bodies, we seem to be aware of a universal order.[1]

Similar as this proposition is to Williams's own beliefs, it is necessary to say that Williams goes further by insisting that the body does not arouse an awareness of divinity in a vague, undefined way, but in its very shape and life demonstrates something of the nature of that divinity. Attention has already been drawn to his passion for ritual, order, perceptible pattern: the human body is the living representation of these attributes. C.S. Lewis describes this conception admirably in the sentence 'it is an ideal geometry mediated through an actual arrangement of living curves'. The emphasis falls on the word which Williams himself so frequently used: 'geometry'.

In the poem Taliessin in the School of the Poets this particular concept is versified. The king's poet, arriving at the place in which the younger minstrels of the court are gathered, launches into an extempore lyric in praise of the craftsmanship of the figure of Phoebus laid out in mosaic on the floor. (The influence of Hopkins can clearly be seen in the use of the compound epithet, alliteration and half-rhyme).

> Skeined be the creamed-with-crimson sphere
> on a guessed and given line,
> skeined and swirled on the head-to-heel,

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1 The Image of the City, p.xxv.

> or radial arm's point-to-point;
> reckoned the rondures of the base
> by the straight absolute spine.[1]

The mental picture conjured by the images 'given line', 'head-to-heel', 'point-to-point' is inevitably that of the so-called Vitruvian man - drawings from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries showing the nude figure of a man arms and legs stretched out to meet the edges of the circle which surrounds him - a diagram in which the connection between geometric and organic beauty is perfectly realised. The geometry of the human body, as we have seen, is, for Williams, as it was for many thinkers of the Ancient World and for many artists of the Renaissance, the foundation of a whole philosophy. A dense passage from The Departure of Dindrane forcefully demonstrates this conception of the perfectly organised pattern of creation centring and focussing on the human figure.

> The hazel of the cattle-goad, of the measuring-rod,
> of the slaves discipline, or Logres' highway, of Merlin's
> wand of magic, of her lord's line of verse,
> of the octave of song, of the footpace under the altar,
> straight and strong, was in Dindrane's bare arm,
> fair measure in the body of the body's deeds.[2]

Dindrane (Blanchefleur) is leaving the court of Arthur for the life of a nun, and Taliessin, looking down on the scene of the departure of his beloved, catches sight of Dindrane's arm in the sunlight. We are

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1 Taliessin, p.23.

2 The Region of the Summer Stars, p.31.
Cf. the essay 'Sensuality and Substance'.

> The wonder, the thrill, of a shoulder or a hand awaits its proper exploration. At present we have simply nothing to say to anyone in a state of exaltation, watching for 'meaning', except something which sounds very much like: 'Well, don't look too intently.' The hungry sheep look up for metaphysics, the profound metaphysics of the awful and redeeming body, and are given morals.
> The Image of the City, pp.74-75.

immediately taken back to Williams's first novel, Shadows of Ecstasy, and the moment of love in which Philip notices Rosamond's arm across the living room. Philip sees the shape of the Downs, Taliessin (such is the freedom and power of poetry) sees in Dindrane's arm the beauty and order of the whole world: the world of agriculture and social life, of travel and medicine, of artistic and religious apprehension. The explanation of the universe lies in a single gesture.

But in comparing Williams with the Renaissance artists it is necessary to emphasise that his 'philosophy' is radically different from that humanistic spirit which came to regard man as 'the measure of all things'. Man is never a self-sufficient or self-explanatory entity for Williams: his preoccupation with the human body is the preoccupation with an image. Man can only be called the measure of all things in the sense that he functions as the prime created image of the Divine. The human body is the living image of the principles of Divine life; and those principles are seen as 'geometrical' in their arrangement. One recalls how frequently in Williams's prose the accuracy and order of heaven are contrasted with the inaccuracy and disorder of hell. The reality of which man presents an image is to be found in the pattern of exchanged love that is the life of the Trinity and the exchanged being that is the Incarnate Lord. It cannot be stressed too strongly that at the centre of this philosophy is his principle of Incarnation. The second to last stanza of the poem that has already been under discussion, Taliessin in the School of the Poets, can be accounted among his most subtle expressions of this complex doctrine.

> Infinite patterns opened
> in the sovereign chair's mass;
> but the crowned form of anatomized man,
> bones, nerves, sinews,
> the diagram of the style of the Logos,
> rose in the crimson brass.[1]

The scene is the Emperor's throne room, a place of shining beauty and glorious design. Taliessin has been talking of beauty and design of another kind. Artistic order and beauty of whatever kind has its roots in the order and beauty of God. The 'style' of God is geometric: the diagram of that style is the human figure ('anatomized man'). The 'geometry' of God is an exchange of love: the diagram of that geometry is the life of a man. Williams introduces the word 'Logos' into his exposition at this point. The introduction is, in a way, unfortunate. It is the only occasion in the sequence when the word is mentioned and the idea is left hanging. I have already commented on the fact that Williams had no developed theology of the 'Logos' in his prose works, and the poetic cycles make no attempt to provide one. The word carries no theological weight in the poem - its appearance is too sudden and isolated to convey much to the reader. Its introduction, in fact, is caused by, what might be called, motives of prosodic expediency; it is not part of a pattern of images nor does it fulfil theological purpose. But its sound and shape fit in with the colour and movement of the verse. It falls correctly on the ear, but it carries no 'meaning'.[2]

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1 Taliessin, p.30.

2 See Appendix III.

A later poem in the same volume, The Coming of Palomides, approaches the question of man as the image of God from another angle: that of romantic love.

> Blessed (I sang) the Cornish queen;
> for until today no eyes have seen
> how curves of golden life define
> the straightness of a perfect line,
> till the queen's blessed arm became
> a rigid bar of golden flame
> where well might Archimedes prove
> the doctrine of Euclidean love.[1]

The stanza introduces the world of the lover. Palomides is Dante seeing Beatrice for the first time; he is the Williams of the early love sonnets; Joseph in Seed of Adam; Philip in Shadows of Ecstasy. The impact of the romantic vision is identical for all the lovers: Palomides, Dors, Taliessin, Lancelot. In the 'Beatrician moment' the beloved shines with a glory and significance that commands adoration and humility. Of the two words, 'significance' is perhaps the more important to Williams's vocabulary. The figure and the presence of the beloved seem to hold the key to the meaning of all existence, and Williams is intent on describing this meaning in terms of a mathematical order: the romantic vision reveals the pattern of God's life. And so the word 'glory', if less important, is only slightly less so. The experience has a decidedly religious quality that commands the ascription. The lover, we must remind ourselves, is forbidden to rest in the 'Beatrician moment'. The vision is transitory; the sense of glory fades and the lover is left with the difficult task of translating the vision, of making sense of the momentary

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1 Taliessin, pp.34-35.

wonder. The experience of falling in love, as all the lovers of these cycles discover, is only the beginning of the way to the fulfilment of personal joy and knowledge. Like Dante each one has to make the 'effort after the pattern'. The romantic vision is the particular means he has been granted of perceiving that a pattern and a meaning do really exist, and that he is capable of discovering them. The image of the reality must not be taken for the reality itself. The maxim 'This also is Thou: neither is this Thou' operates most forcefully in this situation.

The Arthurian sequence presents four pairs of lovers and four approaches to the romantic experience. In the figures of Lancelot and Guinivere we are shown the tragedy which results from the failure to distinguish between the image and the reality; between the representation of the pattern - Guinivere - and the pattern itself - God. In the case of Palomides we are given the hard and bitter struggle of the attempt to translate the passionate love for Iseult into love of another kind: the pattern of Christian faith and truth. In the case of Bors and Elayne the vision is worked out in the way which is most familiar to us - the area of everyday married life. The figures of Taliessin and Blanchefleur embody the strangest approach. It is the approach, at one level, by the Via Negativa. The vision of romantic love is recognised and accepted by both of them as real and important, but its translation into the conventional terms of sexual intercourse is refused, willingly, by both. They choose to explore the meaning in another way. Taliessin is a poet, Blanchefleur becomes a nun: each vocation is incompatible with the ordinary expression of passionate love. Each of them transmutes the

power of the vision into creativity of a kind other than physical love.

The pattern of these various loves in the Arthurian cycles helps to throw light on Williams's rather cryptic remarks about the sexual habits of the Early Christian Church in the first chapter of Descent of the Dove. He says, 'There grew up, it seems, in that young and ardent body an effort towards a particular spiritual experiment of, say, the polarization of the senses.'[1] In the figures of Bors and Taliessin (Elayne and Blanchefleur) one can see that 'polarization' being worked out. Sexual activity is not to be identified with passionate, romantic love. The vision contains the sexual urge but it need not be expressed in terms only of physical intercourse, it can be recognised and transmuted into power of another kind. He notes that the experiment of setting up a whole pattern of Christian activity based on this deliberate effort at 'sublimation' failed, '... we know nothing - most unfortunately - of the cases in which it did not fail, and that there were such cases seems clear

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1 p.11. The discussion begins here and continues until p.14.

from St. Paul's quite simple acceptance of the idea'.[1] It is strange to see the name of D.H. Lawrence introduced into the discussion on the Early Church, but Williams's profound understanding of, and sympathy with, Lawrence has been remarked before, and Williams introduces Lawrence to bolster his argument.

> The use of sex, in this experiment, might have been to pass below itself and release the dark gods of D.H. Lawrence directly into the kingdom of Messias. It failed, and it must be added that St. Paul's foresight was justified. The Church abandoned that method in favour of the marriage method, which he had deprecated, and eventually lost any really active tradition of marriage itself as a way of the soul.[2]

1
Williams is not precise about his sources for this interpretation of St. Paul's thought, but he seems to be referring to the seventh chapter of the first epistle to the church in Corinth.

> Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me:
> It is good for a man not to touch a woman.
> Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband ....
> I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.
> But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.

The commentators all seem to be in agreement with St. John Chrysostom that the things whereof the Corinthians had written were 'whether it was right to abstain from one's wife or not'. (Homilies on I Corinthians, XIX) and see the question originating in the practices of an ultra-ascetic, possibly gnostic, sect. I have not found one commentator interpreting Paul's letter in terms which resemble Williams's talk of experiments in marriage and sexual activity and the re-direction of passional, physical urges. Such an approach is not, however, forbidden, and may even be regarded as logical in the light of modern psychology.

2
Cf. As we live, we are transmittors of life.
And when we fail to transmit life, life fails to flow through us.
That is part of the mystery of sex, it is a flow onwards.

Sexless people transmit nothing.
(We are Transmittors, from Pansies.) D.H. Lawrence.
Cf. also the essay A propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover.

Bors and Elayne are precisely those who have re-discovered marriage and ordinary sexual activity as a way of the soul. Bors, with Perceval and Galahad, is present at the achievement of the Grail. This is the Way of Affirmation at the level of everyday life. Taliessin and Blanchefleur are representative of those who attempt, what Williams calls rather obscurely, the 'experiment' - the translation of sexual energy into vocational activity. This, strangely, is a way of Negation in which the energies that have been denied become powerfully transformed into creative forces.

It must be admitted that there is a certain ambiguity in Williams on the subject of romantic love. On the one hand, there is the undeniable centrality of the romantic experience in his philosophy of the human body and the consequent doctrine of Incarnation and Creation. And there is always the suggestion that the lover has been granted a special grace or 'means of knowing' in his vision. On the other hand, there are the numerous occasions when he declares that the romantic experience is only one of the images of the Way of Affirmation. It might be argued that some kind of ambiguity is inescapable in a case such as this, for the nature of the visionary experience proves always to be paradoxical. It is felt to be both unique and universal. The paradox is delineated with the utmost precision in The Figure of Beatrice when Williams argues that every human being, by definition, potentially possesses the quality of Beatrice.[1] Furthermore, he is concerned to stress that romantic love

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1 p.48.

must not be too narrowly defined.

> Romantic love between the sexes is but one kind of romantic love, which is but a particular habit of Romanticism as a whole, which is itself but a particular method of the Affirmation of Images ....[1]

There is no attempt in either Taliessin Through Logres or The Region of the Summer Stars, as there is in The Figure of Beatrice to chart in detail the way in which the experience of romantic love is related to the life of the City. But what one can see in the poems is that at the centre of the life of the polis stands each individual human being working out the meaning of his own experience of the romantic vision. Williams never separates the individual from the community of which he is a part; what happens in private life determines the quality and events of public existence. The love-relationship cannot be isolated from the social and political movements of the City.[2] A good example of this belief in inter-relatedness is supplied by the poem Bors to Elayne. On the King's Coins. The economic exchange which the money represents is a reflection of the exchange of love between members of the community. But this exchange is doomed unless it can be informed by the same spirit which governs the loving exchange of the married couple. Bors addresses Elayne:

> I have ridden all night from organization in London,
> ration and rule, and the fault in ration and rule,
> law and the flaw in law, to reach to you,
> the sole figure of the organic salvation of our good.

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1 p.63.

2 The City as a poetic image is not prominent in these cycles. To some extent it has been replaced by the image of the Empire. Williams does not make it altogether clear whether the two images are meant to be seen as inter-changeable or not.

> I saw that this was the true end to our making;
> mother of children, redeem the new law.[1]

The central characters of the cycles are all figures concerned with the problem of working out the meaning of their love-relationship in every-day life. The various kinds of loves form an intricate web of inter-dependence which constitutes the fundamental life of the community. And each relationship depends on the others. The whole scheme of romantic love would be incomplete, for instance, without Bors, the ordinary married man, or without Taliessin, the dedicated celibate who, while recognising the authority of the romantic vision chooses to fulfil its demands in a peculiar manner. And so, by implication, the City is built up on the familiar principles of inter-dependence and exchange.

The Fall and Original Sin.

Williams uses two legends as narrative images for his doctrine of Original Sin in the sequence. The first, and the less prominent, is the death of Balan at the hands of Balin, his brother, and the consequent striking of the Dolorous Blow. From this action evil spreads. Men come into conflict with each other and the Fisher King, wounded, lies waiting for the healing and release that will accompany the Coming of the Grail. The second legend is Arthur's incestuous intercourse with his sister Morgause. From this physical union issues Mordred and the train of events that cause the destruction of the kingdom.

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1 Taliessin, p.43.

The two themes are united in the poem Lamorak and the Queen

Morgause of Orkney

> Balin and Balan fell by mistaken impious hate.
> Arthur tossed loves with a woman and split his fate.
> Did you not see, by the dolorous blow's might,
> the contingent knowledge of the Emperor floating into sight.[1]

C.S. Lewis correctly points out, in his commentary, that in both of these actions there is an 'offence against the law of exchange'. But the images are used to convey more than that. It will be remembered that in The English Poetic Mind Williams remarked of the tragedy of Hamlet that in it one saw 'man's vision horribly doubled'. I have already explained the connection I believe to exist between these comments in the books of literary criticism and the discussion of the rebellion of the Adam in He Came Down from Heaven. Now, in a curious way, here in the Arthurian cycles these incidents of death and intercourse are images of single things being seen in a horrible double vision. Balin and Balan are two sides of the same coin; Arthur and Morgause represent a single entity. But the unity is fractured and the sides are set against each other. They are examples of that 'actual schism in reason' which is at the basis of all Williams's thinking about sin. In the two cycles the position of the theological essays is exactly reproduced. Echoes of He Came Down from Heaven sound over and over again. In, for example, this same poem he speaks of the Adam who desired 'to know good as evil', and of '... eyes splintered, as our father Adam's'. The clearest and

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1 Ibid., p.40.

longest exposition in the sequence is to be found in 'The Vision of the Empire'. Every other instance is essentially a repetition of this.

> The tree about them died undying,
> the good lusted against the good,
> the Acts in conflict envenomed the blood
> on the twisted tree hung their body wrying.
>
> Joints cramped; a double entity
> spewed and struggled, good against good;
> they saw the mind of the Emperor as they could,
> his imagination of the wars of identity.[1]

Here, as elsewhere, Williams outlines the position that was discussed in the chapter which dealt with He Came Down from Heaven. God (the Emperor) is capable of knowing both good and its contradiction i.e. its absence, by intellect only - here called 'imagination'. But man's knowledge is of a different kind. It is a condition of creation that what he knows by intellect he receives also by experience. The Fall is a story of the experience of contradiction in knowledge: good is known experientially as evil.

In The Crowning of Arthur the possible effects of this division in man's nature are hinted at in a line which recalls the epigraph Williams places at the beginning of Taliessin: 'the king made for the kingdom or the kingdom made for the king'.[2] The thought is not developed in this poem, but the question of the relation of function and being hovers in the background throughout the cycle. In men whose reason is in schism there is the constant temptation to assume that an image - the

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1 Ibid., p.10.

2 Ibid., p.21.

lover, the king, the poet - has an independent existence and does not function as a particular representation of a greater reality. Those most dangerously exposed are lovers and rulers for the reason that they possess very obvious, material privileges and powers. Lancelot is exposed to the temptation in his relationship with Guinivere and fails the test. Taliessin, Bors, Palomides undertake to serve love; with varying degrees of self-awareness, humility, pain and resentment. Arthur, as king, remains an enigmatic figure throughout the sequence and seems to die irresolutely. But at the centre of the scene there is one who perfectly embodies that self-knowledge and humility which recognise the vital distinction between image and reality, function and being: Galahad.

The Atonement.

The aim of the two cycles of Arthurian poems could scarcely be more ambitious: it is to tell the story of man's fall from perfection and grace and his restoration and regeneration. Its subject is, therefore, nothing less than the whole Christian myth. Christianity is built upon the two pillars of Incarnation and Atonement. We have already seen how Williams presents his belief in the Incarnation; we turn now to the Atonement - the return of man, in Christ, to God. The narrative framework of this story of restoration is the legend of the Holy Grail, the symbolic centre is the 'High Prince': Galahad. What exactly the Grail is, or was, is, as I have already maintained, of little interest to Williams. It is the quest which is significant. The Grail, by

itself, cannot effect the regeneration of Arthur's corrupt and disintegrating kingdom: in a peculiar manner, Galahad's entry into Sarras can and does. It is accurate then to refer to Galahad as a 'Christ-figure', but care is needed in the use of the term. Galahad is not simply the metaphorical equivalent of Christ. It is true that his birth is mysterious, that he is spoken of (in the tradition of Malory) as 'spotless', that his coming to Logres brings division to the established community of the Round Table, and that he is assumed into heaven on the accomplishment of his mission. But he is, quite definitely, not a supernatural figure. Though endowed with heavenly graces they are not his by right, they are the gifts of God for the perfection of his own nature. He is representative of man as well as the image of Christ. C.S. Lewis's estimate of Williams's Galahad is 'Man - Man in his perfection'.[1]

One of the most puzzling features of the Galahad story, as it has been received from the Queste through Malory, is the circumstances of his birth. He is begotten by Lancelot on the body of the daughter of the Grail Keeper (Helayne) in the mistaken belief that she is Guinevere. In his essay Malory and the Grail Legend Williams refers to the creation of Galahad as the son of Lancelot as 'a superb invention of the very first importance';[2] and he uses the situation as the pivotal point for his own conception of the character and role of the High Prince. In the

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1 Arthurian Torso, p.170.

2 The Image of the City, p.187.

first place there is the irony of the event - a symbol, for Williams, of the way in which the Grace of God operates in the world. The act of 'evil concupiscence' on the part of Lancelot is transformed into an agency of salvation. What happens is a kind of reversal of the Fall, where good has become known as evil. Evil here becomes known as an occasion of good. In the second place, the situation, as a literary creation, can be regarded as an image of the two Ways. Lancelot, the prime representative (however failed) of the Way of Affirmation through romantic love, begets the prime representative of the Way of Negation: a son who denies all but the common courtesies of life for the achievement of the Grail. Thirdly, at an aesthetic level, there is a nice balance between the circumstances of Galahad's birth and those of Arthur's son Mordred who is responsible for the destruction of the kingdom. Finally, and most importantly, there is Williams's use of the story as a parable of substitution. The 'invention' is an artistic symbol and we are not concerned with the morality of the way Lancelot is cheated by the magical substitution of Helayne for Guinivere in the sexual act; we are only concerned with the fact of substitution and the artistic use to which it is put. Galahad is the child of substitution and therefore an image of the way man is redeemed.

The High Prince himself performs no acts of substitution in Williams's cycle. He exists in a way peculiar to himself, and artistically, the poem forbids such an action on his part. Yet the cycle is deeply occupied with substitution and exchange, and all the characters are judged by the way they respond to these laws which govern the co-inherent life.

In the poem 'The Last Voyage' for instance, we find that together with Galahad, Bors and Percivale in the ship voyaging to the land of the Trinity, Sarras, is the body of Blanchefleur.

> Before the helm the ascending - descending sun
> lay in quadrilaterial covers of a saffron pall
> over the bier and the pale body of Blanchefleur,
> mother of the nature of lovers, creature of exchange;
> drained there of blood by the thighed wound,
> she died another's death, another lived her life.[1]

The echo of Felicitas's cry is unmistakeable. Blanchefleur is also a Christ-figure, but in the complementary way to Galahad. She is the instrument of exchange. The legend tells of her literally giving her blood in order to save another's life. This, in the cycle, is the supreme example of the vicarious life; of substitution; the concrete re-presentation of the sacrificial death of Christ. And her place is with Galahad and those others who have achieved the Grail in the land of the Trinity.

The idea of substitution is introduced in a more unconventional context in an earlier poem entitled Taliessin on the Death of Virgil. It is a meditation on the ultimate fate of those souls who have not received the dispensation of Christ. Dante and Williams part company. At the summit of the mountain of Purgatory in The Divine Comedy Virgil is forced to leave his pupil and return to the ante-chamber of Hell. Williams appears to believe differently.

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1 Taliessin, p.86.

> In that hour they came; more and faster, they sped
> to their dead master; they sought him to save
> from the spectral grave and the endless falling,
> who had heard, for their own instruction, the sound of his calling.
> There was intervention, suspension, the net of their loves,[1]

Instead of being confined, as in The Divine Comedy, to the limbo of the unbaptised and virtuous pagans, Virgil is 'set in the marble of exchange'. His redemption is accomplished by the love and power of those who have admired him, been influenced by him and guided by him. Though lesser men in the achievements of art, they are greater in the life of grace. The poem makes at least two points. First, that every man is dependent upon others for his own salvation; that all life in the kingdom of heaven is vicarious. Secondly, that in the web of co-inherent existence it is possible that no part shall be lost utterly and finally. Once again we are faced with the problem of universalism, and, once again, all that can be said with any certitude is that Williams seems to be deliberately ambiguous in his attitudes. It is important to recognise that it is a quality of ambiguity that he proffers, not a kind of agnosticism, in his apprehension of ultimate salvation and damnation. He refuses to say that he knows nothing about life beyond the grave. He insists that the Christian faith, as he interprets it, allows for the possibility of the rejection of God which must, in the end, be experienced as damnation and hell, but that at the same time preaches a message of the final perfection of the loving purposes of God in creation - and this

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1 Ibid., p.32.

may include the salvation of Virgil. The concluding poem of The Region of the Summer Stars sums up the ambiguity of the approach in the closing prayer of the Pope.

> Thou hast spoken a word of power in the midst of hell,
> and well are thine Acts everywhere qualified with eternity.
> That Thou only canst be, Thou only
> everywhere art; let hell also confess thee,
> bless thee, praise thee, and magnify thee for ever.

The Eucharist.

It has been made obvious by those who knew Williams well that his personal, devotional life revolved around the Holy Eucharist. He has not written at length about the doctrine of the Eucharist in his prose works, but when he does introduce the subject he writes with such intensity and confidence that the testimony of his friends is more than adequately borne out. It is clear from The Descent of the Dove that the sacrament of the altar is the concrete, material point at which his whole system of belief is realised. This is the eternally contemporary instance of the Incarnation and the Atonement: the supreme instance of substitution and exchange; the meeting-place of heaven and earth in which the natural existence of men is taken into and transformed by the supernatural life of God. It is thus the greatest of all the images - it leads the whole of creation into God. But his deepest and most searching exposition of the Eucharist is to be found, not in The Descent of the Dove, nor in any of the poems, nor in any of the theological essays, but in his prose commentary on the history of the Grail legends, The Figure of Arthur.

In two paragraphs, magnificently characteristic of his prose style, he introduces the central themes of all his labours and presents us with the main outlines of his whole systematic theology.

> Only the Act continued everywhere. The phrase of the New Testament - 'He was known to them in the breaking of the bread' - remained true and became more widely true, although the knowledge was not intellectually epigrammatized. The relation of the elements to the Sacred Body was called sometimes identity, sometimes figure or symbol. But neither figure nor symbol implied separation; each word implied an interior closeness which they have perhaps with us lost. The Act was priestly, by Christ and for Christ, the mysterious sacrifice was of Christ; and Christ in it was the food of man. The sacrifice was offered not only on earth but in the heights of the heavens. He offered, who was the offering, and there was as yet no controversy in the Church.
>
> But as the Nature of Our Lord was defined, and as the Church became more and more aware of what in fact she believed, so the intellectual problems of that Act were more and more discussed. It was stressed now one way and now another; but no stress necessarily denied another. It was a symbol, but it was He. It was the offering of His passion, and communion with His ascended life. This was His very death; it was also His very Resurrection; it was, all ways, His Incarnation. It was a double Act; there was a kind of exchange in it. The Church gave itself, and Christ gave Himself, and the two were united. 'If you have received well', said Augustine, 'you are that which you have received'. Such a sentence, in some sense, holds all; it is this which, in the English words of Malory, centuries later, was 'the secret of our Lord Jesus Christ'.[1]

The Arthurian cycles are profoundly Eucharistic though few of them are as explicit as, for example, the thirteen poems, On the Sanctissimum, from the early volume Windows of Night. But even at the lowest level, the level of narrative, we find the verse bustling with people going to or coming from Mass. The climax is a Eucharistic scene: Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass. The Grail, whatever it may represent in anthropology

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1 Arthurian Torso, pp.14-15.

and pagan legend, is, quite simply the chalice used by Christ in the Upper Room at the Last Supper, and becomes the ultimate symbol of the Eucharistic life. At the close of the epic Arthur's world dissolves in war and chaos; the day to day organisation and order of life is broken, and in the midst of a disintegrating world the sacrament, the material presentation of the union of God and man in Christ, stands at the centre holding creation together. Whatever man may do in his attempts to pervert himself and destroy the world; however strong his desire to know good as evil, the fundamental fact of the Incarnation remains unaffected. In the dense imagery and rhythmically packed lines of The Prayers of the Pope Williams depicts a life torn and bitter, but destined to salvation and transformation by the unimaginable power of God.

> The Pope passed to sing the Christmas Eucharist.
> .....
> the Body of the Eucharist, the Body of the total loss,
> the unimaged loss; the Body salvaged the bodies
> in the fair, sweet exchange of the Pope's prayer.
> The easement of exchange led into Christ's appeasement
> under the heart-breaking manual acts of the Pope.
> . . . . . consuls and lord's within the Empire,
> for all the darkening of the Empire and the loss of Logres
> and the hiding of the High Prince, felt the Empire
> revive in the hope of the Sacred City.[1]

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1 The Region of the Summer Stars, p.61.

CONCLUSION

I claimed in the Introduction to this study that a systematic theologian could be described as one who 'seeks to enlighten and inform by demonstrating, according to the pattern of his intellectual and emotional sensitivity, the inter-relation of the doctrines of the Christian religion and their essential unity'. In the course of my examination of Charles Williams's work I have tried to show that Williams, however unconsciously and unintentionally, fulfilled precisely such a role: that beneath the prodigious variety of his literary activity there lay a coherent pattern of religious thought and belief that demands the name of a systematic theology, and that every work is stamped with the unmistakeable shape of this pattern. It is both comprehensive and coherent: the traditional doctrines of the Creed: the Trinity, Creation, the Fall, the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Church, are all contained within it. And they are woven together and held together by means of certain key-concepts or governing themes. It is the existence of those which gives to Williams's theology its distinctiveness. Each doctrine is interpreted and related to each other doctrine by means of the beliefs in co-inherence, exchange, substitution, and the ultimate glory and heavenly beauty of the physical creation of which the human being is the

representative and crown. Furthermore I have tried to indicate the profound originality of his sensibility and his capacity to frame traditional dogmas in such a way that the inherited doctrine is neither lost nor obscured but transformed and renewed into a force which penetrates the hard shell of familiarity.

The work has been, of necessity, largely a matter of analysis and commentary - a procedure which, quite properly, may be viewed with dubiety when art is in question. To analyse is frequently to destroy, and to systematise a work of art is frequently to deaden its impact and to falsify its intention. I do not believe, however, that I have falsified the work of Williams by imposing an external system upon it, but have merely tried to indicate the ways in which a unique structure of thought and feeling expresses itself in poetry, novels, drama and critical essays. To counterbalance the impression which might have been gained of Williams as a severely cerebral metaphysician, it is worth recalling the remark he made in connection with Milton, and recognise its appropriateness as a description of Williams himself.

> But he never forgot that ... good was somehow victorious beauty, that romantic love was a wonder of grace and authority and delight, and that laughter was one of the divinest virtues allowed to man.

APPENDIX I

The Biographies.

Williams produced six biographies in all, five of them between the years 1933 and 1937, and the sixth, Flecker of Dean Close, the year before his death in 1945. Although they have nothing to add, directly, to the theological outline of his thought, they cannot go entirely unmentioned, not only because they form a substantial part of the complete body of work, but because they help to reveal a further dimension of the character and sensibility of the author. Williams was never a scholar or an 'intellectual' despite the obvious intellectual power that lay at his command. He lacked the scholar's patience and meticulous concern with detailed information, and a close examination of his texts unearths misleading references, careless factual errors, and false trails. He was led on to a kind of impatience by a diversity of interest and circumstance and a vivid urgency of imagination. Biographies belong to an area in which accuracy is of some importance, and, from time to time, in all of these studies one is aware that Williams is sliding over problems which call for more searching investigation and ignoring details which ought to be mentioned if a picture of the subject is to be presented with anything like completeness. To the pedantic mind these volumes are, doubtless, irritating yet even the slightest of them contains shafts of

insight - intuitive perhaps - that illuminate the person or period under discussion far more brilliantly than many a painstaking and meticulous chronicling of facts. It must be understood that Williams was not writing histories, he was making an attempt to enter the life and times of particular historical personages, and the degree to which he achieved his purpose reveals itself in the quality of his prose. More is involved than mere linguistic technique; there is an authority in his writing which conveys the seriousness of his purpose and convinces the reader of the depth of his understanding.

It is perhaps accidental (Williams working to commission) that five of the six biographies deal with figures from the reigns of the Tudors and the Stuarts, yet when one remembers Williams's devotion to, and understanding of, Shakespeare and Milton one can hardly imagine a period of English history more sympathetic to his mind. Of all the personalities crowding these years Elizabeth I seems to stand out in his imagination as the most fascinating, and the most puzzling. Strangely enough, however, it is not in his biography of Elizabeth, but in that of James I, that Williams records his most penetrating insights into her character and produces those intuitive shafts of perception which have been mentioned, and which illuminate the whole age of the Tudors.

> Elizabeth had been an experience, glorious, terrifying, sometimes enjoyable, sometimes disagreeable, but unique .... It had been unlikely that she could succeed to the Throne; more unlikely that she could succeed on the Throne; most unlikely that she could without a husband. She had done all three .... The Church of England, incredibly Catholic and impossibly Protestant, is not unlike the Queen, who was incredibly royal and impossibly vulgar - in the original sense of the word. Something in the genius of

> our nation combines opposites ... heaven has created only one people who are mystics in irony and martyrs in unbelief ....[1]

Besides conveying a deep understanding of the bewildering personality of Elizabeth and throwing light on the extraordinary fact of its congruity in the pattern of English life, the passage expresses, in its antiphonal periods and paradoxical assertions, an essential aspect of Williams's own personality, and helps, incidentally, to explain his intense devotion to the Church of England.

This devotion was recognised by all those who knew him well and it makes itself felt in works like War in Heaven, Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury, and especially the last of his biographies, and the only modern one he wrote, Flecker of Dean Close. William Herman Flecker was a great churchman, but one whose evangelical principles and piety could hardly have elicited an immediately sympathetic response from a man of Williams's training and temperament. Yet the portrait is drawn with a care and understanding that has roots not only in a personal admiration but in a love for the church of which both managed to remain loyal, though critical, members. And the source of Williams's devotion lay, to a large extent, in his belief that in an almost miraculous way this church embodied a motif of antimony, contradiction almost, that no other Christian body in the world possessed. The understanding of the character of the first Elizabeth provides a clue to the understanding of the Church of England, and what he says about the Queen in another place

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1 pp.178-179.

could be applied, almost without qualification, to the church.

> It is impossible to make a reasonable heroine out of the great Queen, but then the effort need not be made. She demanded impossibilities but she herself was an impossibility. She could not be, yet she was, and she went on being; that was the indestructible centre of her renown.[1]

Here, in the study of Elizabeth's personality a theological vision is being translated into terms of human psychology, and the Queen becomes, for Williams, a historical embodiment of the experience of contradiction discovered in the works of Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth. And so also, in a mysterious manner, the Church of England is viewed as a living image of the inescapable experience of contradiction in the life of every human being.

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1 Ibid., p.90.

APPENDIX II

A Note on Williams's approach to Wordsworth.

One of the most remarkable features of Williams's literary criticism is the space he gives to examining the poetry of Wordsworth and the extent to which he was able to penetrate the fastness of the personality lying behind his verse. Williams was not, by temperament, drawn to the Romantic Imagination of the nineteenth century. I have already mentioned his lack of interest in the countryside and the world of Nature, an interest which characterised much of the work of the English representatives of Romanticism. But, more significantly, Romantic art failed to provide, for Williams, on the one hand, the intellectual toughness of the literary products of earlier centuries, and, on the other, that rootedness in the physical realities of the material world which was so prominent a mark of his own sensibility. The religion of the Romantics evaporated all too quickly into the realm of the spirit where vague generalities about feelings replaced the hard facts of dogma.

His approach to Wordsworth is, in consequence, not by the conventional paths of the early and great poems (Tintern Abbey, Resolution and Independence, the Lucy poems, the Immortality Ode), but by way of certain passages in The Prelude. This long poem is Wordsworth's meditation on the development of his own poetic persona - the story, as he calls it, of

'the growth of a poet's mind', and he gives to the eleventh and twelfth books the sub-title 'Imagination: Impaired and Restored'. This theme is the centre of Williams's study, for he sees in the life of the nineteenth century poet the experience of that crisis in the processes of the creative imagination which is the subject of his play A Myth of Shakespeare, and which he made the cardinal problem of the critical essay The English Mind: the loss of artistic vision; the despair and panic following upon the sudden dissolution of all sense of purpose and meaning in life.

In the fifth chapter of The English Poetic Mind Williams writes of Wordsworth:

> The crisis of Troilus and the crisis of Satan is related to the crisis which fell on Wordsworth: at least as he discovers and expresses it in the Prelude.

The suggestion is that Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth all endured a similar experience, though neither Shakespeare nor Milton expressed the crisis in the quasi-autobiographical way that Wordsworth, with remarkable daring, chose. But Williams is less sure in his treatment of Wordsworth than in his handling of the two earlier poets - partly because of the lack of sympathy that I have already pointed out. The impression of ambiguity that is conveyed in the long chapter on Wordsworth seems to reflect his inability to decide whether Wordsworth resolved his imaginative difficulties or not, though at the end of the study Williams makes a statement which indicates that he believed that Wordsworth, like Tennyson some years later, failed to cope 'poetically' with the crisis -

or, at least failed to embody the resolution in his art.

> He could not explore his own crisis by meeting it in poetry. He had to deal with his crisis as it had been resolved by other aids, and those aids and their result his poetry never fully assumed.

APPENDIX III

A Note on the doctrine of the Logos.

If Williams's theological system can be said to be seriously defective at any point, it is in his failure to deal adequately with the concept of the Logos, i.e. with the nature and place of the Second Person of the Trinity within the life of the Godhead itself and also His specific operation in relation both to Incarnation and Creation. The word, Logos, occurs several times in Williams's work but it seldom carries any real theological significance. In the novel, The Place of the Lion, however, a notion of the Word is integral to the intellectual framework of the book, but it is doubtful whether it can be called specifically Christian in its content. Williams, it must be admitted, has been intellectually promiscuous here, and the 'system' which underlies the plot is, as we have seen, a rather confused mixture of various philosophical schemes - not all of them compatible with each other. There is no attempt to show the Word becoming incarnate in the world.

This deficiency in regard to the question of the Logos, Williams appears to share with most modern theologians, including those who have deliberately attempted the construction of a comprehensive system, and it is a deficiency which Karl Rahner is concerned to show up in his

recent little study entitled The Trinity (trans., J. Donceel, London, 1970), where he accuses the Church of isolating the doctrine of the Trinity from that of the Incarnation, and Christian writers of speaking too 'generally' about the latter in their references merely to the Incarnation of God instead of to the flesh-taking of the Word, or the union of God and man in Jesus Christ instead of the union of the Son and man in the historical life of Jesus.

> Nowadays when we speak of God's incarnation, the theological and religious emphasis lies only on the fact that "God" became man, that "one" of the divine persons (of the Trinity) took the flesh, and not on the fact that this person is precisely the person of the Logos. (p.11)

This failure to ask fundamental questions about the Incarnation, e.g. why it is that the Logos is the flesh-taker and not one of the other Persons of the Godhead and what this activity of God has to tell us about the shape and inner meaning of the earthly life of Jesus, casts serious doubt, according to Rahner, upon the seriousness with which both theologians and believers treat what is supposed to be vital to their faith - the belief in the Triune God.

> The "economic" Trinity is the immanent Trinity, according to the statement which interests us. In one way this statement is a defined doctrine of the faith. Jesus is not simply God in general, but the Son. The second person, God's Logos, is man, and only he is man. (p.23)

And Williams must also, in some measure, fall under the same condemnation. In all of his most direct and substantial Christological statements (He Came Down from Heaven, Ch.iv; The Forgiveness of Sins, Ch.v; the essays The Cross, The Way of Exchange.), there is no mention of the

Person of the Logos and His special activity, though I would hesitate to call in question the seriousness of his belief in the Trinity. There is, for instance, an isolated sentence in his review of G.L. Prestige's book Fathers and Heretics (Time and Tide, November 16, 1940) which is not a vague, 'general' statement about the Incarnation and which shows Williams, momentarily, focussing attention on the distinctive operation of the Word: 'The divine diagram of Reason had lived as man.' Unfortunately he immediately blurs the effect of this Christological statement in order to say something about the inner quality of the life of the Triune God: 'The flesh of man has been taken up into the mathematics of Deity'. So the nature of God's Reason, the Logos, and the unique conjunction of this Reason with human flesh, goes unconsidered.

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